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The child in film and television: introduction

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If the child and stories about childhood, like psychoanalysis, have acquired a quasi-religious significance – have become our most convincing essentialism – it is perhaps because children are, as their parents always say, impossible. They want more than they can have. And, at least to begin with, they are shameless about it.¹

¹ Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), p. 119.

In a range of contemporary discourses – medical, psychological, historical, mythical – the child is, as Adam Phillips suggests above, perhaps the essential ‘subject’ in contemporary culture, romanticized and pathologized. The obsession with children and childhood can be witnessed in the stream of autobiographies detailing abused childhoods, in the television programmes concerned with the ‘failure’ of contemporary parenting and the ‘tiny tearaways’ it apparently produces, in the ‘crossover’ fiction of Philip Pullman and J.K. Rowling, in the tyranny of ‘pester power’ and in the menace of so called ‘happy slapping’ in the city centres of the UK. Romanticized as innocent, as the ‘investment in our future’, or invoked as symptomatic of society’s failure, the child is at the centre of cultural and political debates. Controversially, in his radical polemic *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman rages at the repressive nature of these and other discourses enshrined by the ‘Child’, which he identifies as dominated by the concept of ‘reproductive futurism’:

The Child, that is, marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism. And so, as the radical right maintains, the battle against queers is a

- 2 Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 21.

life-and-death struggle for the future of a Child whose ruin is pursued by feminists, queers and those who support the legal availability of abortion.²

As the mother of three little girls I was initially shocked by Edelman's fury and then forced to acknowledge my own acquiescence to unquestioning 'heteronormativity', and then – tumbling after – the other popular myths and ideological structures the Child shores up: the 'family', the 'life-cycle', childhood as 'universal', and the child as the emblematic figure who, as Edelman points out, shoulders society's fantasies of the 'future and the past' and with this the anthropocentric view of history. Why choose this 'Child' as the subject of a special issue of *Screen*? Precisely because 'he', 'she', or even 'it' becomes interesting once the child and childhood is understood to be never fully encompassed by these stories and discourses. And that while, yes, this Child is the 'subject' of conservative, repressive discourses, real children are never contained by them. They want, as Phillips suggests 'more than they can have'. They want and they *act*, and they should therefore be understood as *agents* as well as subjects. As Phillips also suggests, the child whose agency we confront (even if we do not recognize it as agency) is frequently 'impossible'. Therefore – incoherently, unsystematically and frequently unavailingly – the child and childhood are resistant to becoming the 'subject' of study. What interests me, and the majority of authors in this issue, is how this agency – the disruptive, impossible, unintelligible aspects of childhood and the child – is imagined, portrayed and performed in film and television.

For me, the essential understanding of the child here is the child as *being* rather than becoming. Specifically, in relation to film and television I think that an important aspect of the child-as-agent is that the child encourages us, as the cliché has it, to *see* the world differently.

When we are children, people show us so many things that we lose the profound sense of seeing. Seeing and showing are phenomenologically in violent anti-thesis. And just how could adults show us the world they have lost!³

What is the difference between 'seeing' and 'showing'? Seeing implies certain qualities and a particular response: it is an unregulated gaze, timeless and ahistorical, it also implies fascination and a sense in which effects (what is seen) are closer to affect (what is felt). 'Seeing' is the 'oooh!' of wonder at fireworks in the night, or the absorbed but pointless gaze which follows ants and beetles as they labour in the grass, returns again and again to the scab on your knee, explores cloudy breath on a windowpane. 'Showing', in contrast, is precisely not this, but is a directed gaze, purposeful; it is also historical, part of a narrative which links cause to effect, it demonstrates, names and classifies. In Dimitris Eleftheriotis's essay on the Lumière project, he makes a link between an artificial (and thus compromised) 'childlike' approach to cinema

- 3 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language and the Cosmos* (1960) (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 127. My use of Bachelard is inspired here by Chris Philo's essay, "'To go back up the side hill": memories, imaginations and reveries of childhood", *Children's Geographies*, vol. 1, no.1 (2003), pp. 7–23.

(through the use of an early cinematograph) which provides glimpses of the 'Imaginary', and contrasts this with the project's covert acquiescence to a sophisticated, 'grownup' cinema determined by the 'Symbolic'. In my terms, the 'Imaginary' relates to seeing and the 'Symbolic' relates directly to showing. For me, then, the 'trick' of cinema is that it presents 'showing' as 'seeing'. Seeing is what children do; showing is what adults do for children. Inevitably, seeing is never entirely repressed yet it explains, perhaps, why 'seeing things' can often make us uncomfortable. The obvious cinematic reference here is Cole Sear (Haley Joel Osment) in *The Sixth Sense* (M. Night Shyamalan, 1999) who *sees* dead people. Whilst seeing dead people might always be disturbing, it is the way in which the film presents how Cole sees – uncomprehendingly, spontaneously, dangerously and 'messily' – that I find important, and the most compelling aspect of the film. Unsurprisingly, the adult's function in the film – that of the child psychologist Malcolm Crowe (Bruce Willis) – is to *show* Cole how to cope with this gift of seeing. By the end of the film Cole continues to see dead people but he has been *shown* how to listen to their stories, to name them, classify them and contain them as history. In the much hyped 'twist' at the end of the film, Cole demonstrates his new control by turning the 'power' of showing back on to the adult as he finally shows Crowe, exactly, what *he* has lost. Within this film, therefore, the random, excessive and terrifying aspects of seeing are effectively reduced. For Cole this is a relief, but there are, as Bachelard reminds us, pleasures as well as terrors in seeing.

The child's presence and the child's actions, therefore, may serve to remind us of this 'trick' of cinema, and often interrupt the controlling discourse of the film's showing by recalling the pleasures and fears of seeing. In the essays which follow, the child is, more often than not, a disruptive agent. In Emma Wilson's essay 'Children, emotion and viewing in contemporary European film', this is manifest in the way in which the child's presence encourages a haptic experience – an experience where the effect of what is seen is pushed close to what is felt, or, in other words, to its affect.

Although Wilson does not relate this directly to my concept of 'seeing', it is clear that she believes the child's presence and actions encourage viewers to remember childhood sensations and experience in a way that directly challenges the adult's composure and control of how they feel in relation to what they are shown on screen. Providing a close analysis of two films, Lukas Moodysson's *Lilya 4-ever* (2003) and Sandrine Veysset's *Martha . . . Martha* (2001), Wilson suggests these films can 'explore cinematic means of prompting us to remember the intensity and intermittence, the variety and variation of adolescent and infant feeling; such filmmaking can, as Moodysson insists, make an intervention, challenging the politics of representation, in its close attention to child emotion'.

In Phil Powrie's essay, 'Unfamiliar places: "heterospection" and recent French films on children', he confirms that the importance of the

child protagonist is in their offering the adult spectator a challenging position which defamiliarizes ‘what we know’. The presence and the action of the child on screen encourages the adult to look back (nostalgically) and forward (to an imagined future). For Powrie, however, the real charge of the ‘child in film’ is that in certain moments – in which the experience of the child is most effectively represented – the adult spectator is caught up temporarily in a moment of ‘heterospection’. ‘Heterospection’, he states, ‘is a moment which, to quote Foucault again, “simultaneously represents, contests and inverts”’. It looks backwards and forwards, but also sideways, outwards, escaping centrifugally into multiplicities, while at the same time coalescing in a specific moment, a specific place.’ Powrie’s key example is a recurring sequence from Christophe Ruggia’s *Les Diables* (2002), which presents a young girl at play with fragments of coloured glass, a moment of repetitive making and remaking, pointless, distracting, beautiful and potentially harmful. This is more than ‘seeing’ but similar in its ahistorical quality and in the close relation of effect and affect.

The child who ‘sees’, albeit in a more conventional sense, is central to the two following essays which offer close readings of two different child protagonists. In Melanie Williams’s essay on the British star Hayley Mills’s debut film *Tiger Bay* (1959) she describes a key scene in which eleven-year-old Gillie (Mills) sees a murder take place. The child as accidental or involuntary witness to murder or violence is a familiar trope which occurs in several well-known films (for example *Witness* [Peter Weir, 1985] and *The Client* [Joel Schumacher, 1994]), but as Williams points out, the distinction here is that Gillie is firstly a girl and secondly much more interested in acquiring the murder weapon (a gun) than in the murder itself.⁴ Gillie goes on to strike up an unlikely but intriguing relationship with the adult male murderer, who at once reveals to her hints of an erotic future (where grown up and beautiful, she might have ‘all the power in the world’) whilst simultaneously presenting her, as they escape together, with something other than the repressive, tedious or even dangerous feminine roles that Gillie (as a girl child of the 1950s) appears to have in wait for her. In a persuasive argument that identifies *Tiger Bay*’s close thematic and aesthetic links to a key ‘British New Wave’ film featuring another androgynous heroine, *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961), Williams suggests that Gillie is perhaps one of the first female role models in British cinema to represent a ‘something else’ to the repressive, ‘white gloves and hat’ femininity characteristic of Britain in the 1950s. Through her vivid performance of the ‘shambling, charming edge of adolescence’, where the girl child is ‘mischievous, spirited, wearing jeans and climbing trees’, Gillie is a precursor, Williams suggests, to the ‘unpredictable, spontaneous, emotionally honest, sexually active young woman’ vividly portrayed by Julie Christie in the 1965 film *Darling* (John Schlesinger). As such – still a child, not yet and perhaps never to be a ‘lady’ – Gillie articulates the possibilities of a more emancipated future for women in the 1960s and beyond.

4 An exception here is Luc Besson’s *Leon* (1994), which does in fact replay some of the main narrative dynamics of *Tiger Bay* but within a very different social and historical context.

In Paul Sutton's essay on the recent Italian film, *Io non ho paura/I'm Not Scared* (Gabriele Salvatores, 2003) it is a young boy – Michele (Giuseppe Cristiano) – who is witness to a violent crime, in this instance, the kidnapping of another young boy. Placing the film both within the context of Italian film history (where the child protagonist has a particularly powerful and symbolic importance) and in relation to the contemporary 'crisis' of the Italian family, Sutton demonstrates how the film represents – through camerawork and mise-en-scene – the child's perspective in relation to the past and present of Italian history and family relationships. Drawing on and revising Deleuze's conception of the child witness in Italian neorealist films, Sutton suggests that in this film the child is no longer the helpless or 'passive' figure described by Deleuze. Instead, he describes how Michele ultimately ruptures 'the parent–child, child–parent circularity' dynamic of the family and thus moves from 'witness to participant'. Noting that the use of the child protagonist is often criticized as a way of sidestepping political and social responsibilities, Sutton argues, in accord with both Powrie and Wilson, that the affective response generated by the child performer may actually work powerfully to reconnect the adult spectator with his or her own childhood memories. Rather than being apolitical, the revisiting of a childhood curiosity, with its hallucinatory quality and creative mix of fact and fiction, may actively encourage spectators to explore and engage with the political and social implications of a particularly traumatic period of Italian history – the period in which the film is set, the 1970s, the *anni di piombo* or 'years of the bullet'.

Questions relating to the child's subjectivity, the knowledge gained within childhood and what can or cannot be 'known about' the child, are explored in Jonathan Bignell's fascinating study of the British preschool children's television programme *Teletubbies*. Bignell argues that the activities, setting and appearance of the Teletubbies can be understood as both familiar and alien. This contradictory duality allows Bignell to uncover a text which 'participates in a contemporary structure of feeling' identified through postmodernist theoretical discourse, most explicitly in the work of the French theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Inhuman*. In his analysis of the textual properties of the programme and its associated expansion into a range of toys and merchandising, Bignell demonstrates how, in accord with Lyotard's conception of the postmodern, the programme blurs boundaries between 'adulthood and childhood, self and other, now and then, here and there', and reproduces an uncanny but attractive mix of the technological and the organic. The most obvious manifestation of this mix is the periodically active television screens on the fuzzy, material bellies of the Teletubbies themselves. Within the programme, the repeated sequences in which the belly-screens are activated and the audience, along with the Teletubbies, watch short actuality films are, Bignell suggests, central to the way in which the programme mediates 'notions of subjectivity, identity and perception by confusing the distinctions between inner and outer, and

between the this-here of Teletubbyland and the there-then of a “real” world of children’. He further reveals how the constraints and discursive control of the adult ‘voices’ within the programme are gently but consistently subverted by the playful and surreal activities of the Teletubbies, as well as the objects and characters that inhabit their world. With this reading, Bignell is therefore able to reveal *Teletubbies* as a programme that confronts and effectively remodels contemporary concerns; concerns such as the concept of self, the political construction of childhood and the qualities and possibilities articulated by the essentially unknowable ‘child’ (who is, after all, the original alien ‘at home’).

Finally, the importance of understanding and representing children’s agency is demonstrated by Máire Messenger Davies in her article, ‘Crazyspace: the politics of children’s screen drama’. In her defence of the television and filmmaking that she believes upholds the tradition of a ‘gently didactic’ public service provision for children, it may seem as if Davies marks a return to the more conservative discourses around children and childhood that I suggested were not the focus of this issue. While it is true that Davies presents a more conventional (and certainly less slippery) conception of childhood and children, in fact her arguments, which insist on the agency of children and advocate, as she puts it, for the centrality of ‘silly, childish, “wacky” ingredients’, are radical in that they define and defend a political space for children’s agency. Addressing two children’s television programmes in particular – the popular adaptations of Gillian Cross’s *Demon Headmaster* books and another recent BBC drama focusing on asylum seekers, *The Face at the Window* – Davies employs the concept of a ‘space’ for children which, in accordance with the silliness and subversion associated with childhood, is deemed as ‘Crazyspace’. This space is sometimes a real physical location (as in the spare bedroom where Erri, the refugee child, the eponymous ‘face at the window’ is hidden) and sometimes a virtual space (as in the ‘Crazyspace’ bulletin board available via computer through which the children overthrow the Demon Headmaster and his plans to rule the world). Importantly, it is a space in which children are active and frequently ‘impossible’ (and here we return to Philips’s ‘impossible child’). In Crazyspace children are impossible either because they exceed the bounds of realism (in that events are magical or simply implausible) or because they behave in ways that are apparently irrational, ‘crazy’ – at least from the adult’s point of view. Significantly, Crazyspace takes place to one side of, or even ‘inside’, the adult world (whether this is the spare bedroom, or in bulging trouser pockets illicitly stuffed with food). It is therefore often a space which the adult recognizes, knows and even owns, but its meaning and its ‘use’ is determined by the child. As Davies states, the different places of Crazyspace exist, in part, because ‘adults do not notice they are there’. In other words, the adults do not *see* the world as children do. Therefore, what I like about Davies’s concept of Crazyspace is that it engages,

perhaps in a quite surprising manner, with the more explicitly theoretical arguments made by other authors in this issue. As Powrie himself suggests, Davies's conception of Crazyspace connects with his own proposition, following Foucault, of 'deviant heterotopias' which the child protagonist recreates or articulates on screen. These deviant heterotopias reveal a world, in Powrie's argument, which '*becomes unfamiliar in its familiarity*'. This uncanny effect forces the spectator to revisit the world they know but from a different perspective, to reconnect, temporarily, incoherently, with a different time and space, the 'glimmers and limbo' which Bachelard poetically describes as the 'dialectics' of childhood.

Intriguingly, this focus on children's space and agency has brought me back to earlier theoretical interests and, coincidentally, to a previous 'special issue' of *Screen* that I edited, which focused on 'space and place in film'.⁵ In that issue and here, geography, as a discipline which has as its central concern the definition of space and place, offers some rich insights. Significantly, some of the concepts I and the other authors have been reaching towards – the distinction between seeing and showing, the determination of Crazyspace and 'deviant heterotopias', as well as the significance of childhood memories and emotions – have also been explored in some recent work in geography. In the opening volume of a new journal, *Children's Geographies*, two related articles by Chris Philo and Owain Jones address interestingly similar ideas to those presented by the authors in this issue of *Screen*. In his essay, "To go back up the side hill": memories, imaginations and reveries of childhood', Philo proposes that Bachelard's validation and celebration of childhood 'reverie' – identified as a time and space of idleness, of absorption, of daydreaming and '*seeing*' – could be considered as a productive theoretical framework for adult researchers attempting to reach out to and map the 'geography of childhood'. As I have indicated, I have found this conception particularly useful in thinking about what it is that children offer as characters and protagonists in film and television texts. In his addendum to Philo's essay, Jones argues that this points the way towards a new 'emotional geography'. Furthermore, he proposes that a careful mapping of this territory might make it possible to bridge the gap between the 'other' of the child and the 'adult self' of the researcher. He suggests:

These remembered, emotional geographies are hybrid, but indivisible, where the past and present in terms of both self and landscape are present in new creations. But in the myriad remembered geographies which we all carry, traces and implications for all parties (the now self and past selves) may be present and these may include 'fragments of connection' back (in)to childhood that Philo anticipates.⁶

Clearly, these 'fragments of connection' are similar to the spaces or interruptions provoked and articulated by the 'child on screen', identified and described by several authors in this issue. Usefully, however,

5 *Screen*, vol. 40, no. 3, Space/Place/City (1999).

6 Owain Jones, "Endlessly revisited and forever gone": on memory, reverie and emotional imagination in doing children's geographies. An Addendum to "To go back up the side hill": memories, imaginations and reveries of childhood", by Chris Philo, *Children's Geographies*, p. 30.

Jones also cautions that the adult researcher needs to take care in his or her framing and presentation of such 'moments':

But, by the same token, these moments represent childhood at its most remote from adult perspectives. So I feel that we should remain *very alert* to the question that as these places are almost 'adult free zones' by definition, how can adults as researchers enter them without shattering their spell? (Like an adult trying to crawl into a small, fragile 'den' built and occupied on the small (to us) bodily scale of children.)⁷

Such spaces and their potential political and emotional implications have been very carefully described within the different essays in this issue, and all the authors, I feel, have moved sensitively to prevent any shattering of the 'spell' to which Jones alludes. Nevertheless, I am aware that there is still a need to be cautious in over-generalizing from this series of essays, which mark a beginning for the study of the child in film and television. In particular, we need to be aware that I have only been able to include here a very limited range of 'childhoods' and children. The childhoods and children represented via filmmaking in other areas of the world (that is, outwith Europe or North America), such as the work of Kurdish filmmaker Bahman Ghobadi or Iranian filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami, have not been addressed here. These filmmakers' work, as well as films produced in Africa, India and Latin America, could reveal a different emotional register at play in relation to the child on screen, and interpreting these and other films could produce a very different series of analyses, particularly, perhaps, in relation to the agency of the child protagonist.⁸

Nonetheless, this collection of essays concerning the child on screen offers an opportunity to address, from a fresh perspective, the differing relations of power, gender and agency within a diverse range of films and television programmes. The use of the child as a symbolic figure and the concept of childhood have also been uncovered as a way of identifying political and personal agendas at work in the production of film and television texts. In addition, by focusing on the child and childhood, it has also become possible to revisit, with a sense of urgency and wonder, the central issues that matter when watching and interpreting film and television. That is, not only what these films and programmes 'mean', but, more contentiously, whether there is a way back (as well as forwards, or even sideways) to an appreciation of film and television that is not simply about experience and classification, but which privileges or reclaims those moments of childlike fascination that lure many of us back, time and time again, to the cinema or television screen.

I would particularly like to thank Dimitris Eleftheriotis for his support and for the enjoyable discussions I had with him in the process of bringing this issue together.

⁷ Ibid., p. 33.

⁸ Although I should note that these differences are, in a sense, revealed by some of the non-western filmmakers' participation in the Lumière project, and these are described in Dimitris Eleftheriotis's essay for this issue.

Early cinema as child: historical metaphor and European cinephilia in *Lumière & Company*

DIMITRIS ELEFThERIOtIS

In 1995, as part of the celebrations for the centenary of the 'birth' of cinema, the film *Lumière & Company* was made. Although a coproduction with Spain, Denmark and Sweden, the film was essentially a French idea supported substantially by Eurimages and the Council of Europe. Forty directors from around the world accepted the invitation to shoot a short film using a restored cinematograph. The film consists of their combined footage, brief interviews with the directors and scenes of how they shot the films, and several Lumière shorts.

The selection of the directors betrays a French-European male bias: twelve of the directors are French, and several others have French connections; twenty-nine are European; four are American (indicating, perhaps, either a reluctance on their part to participate in a project that proclaimed cinema to be French in its origins, or a reluctance on the part of the producers to involve too many Americans in such a project); three are Asian (Abbas Kiarostami, Zhang Yimou and Yoshida Yoshishige); four are African (Youssef Chahine, Merzak Allouache, Idrissa Ouedraogo and Gaston Kaboré – all from countries with a French colonial history); three of the directors are women (Liv Ullmann, Nadine Trintignant and Helma Sanders-Brahms, none of whom has a strong auteur profile, unlike most of the male directors).¹

Childhood as historical metaphor

Importantly, for the concerns of this issue, the film constructs a powerful metaphor of the early period of cinema as a form of 'childhood'; this is

¹ In fact the first two are, ironically, better known for their associations with famous men: Liv Ullmann as the star of several Bergman films and Nadine Trintignant as the wife of the French star Jean-Louis Trintignant. Ullmann's contribution to the project seems to pay homage not to the Lumière brothers but to Bergman's celebrated director of photography Sven Nykvist.

evident in the conceptual basis of the project, the centenary of the ‘birth’ of cinema. However, the opening, pre-credits sequence is more explicit, not just in its reinforcement of the metaphor but also in its provision of clear and unambiguous images of childhood, and its exploitation of such images in order to define the emotive address of the film.

Lumière & Company opens with three shots of photographs of Luis and August Lumière. Each shot is a slow zoom-out from the faces of the brothers, punctuated by nostalgic piano music. Each photograph represents a distinctly different stage of their lives, starting with early childhood, moving on to adulthood and concluding with a picture of them as old men. In all three pictures the brothers lean against each other, suggesting intimacy, tenderness, support and care. The sequence comes to an end with an extract from the 1897 short *Les premiers pas de Bébé*, which, as the title suggests, depicts a baby (assisted by a carer or parent) taking her first steps towards a doll in front of the cinematograph.

To the strains of notably happier music, the credits roll to reveal the title of the film, establishing the Frenchness of the idea and the institutional support of national and pan-European bodies, followed by a shot of the cinematograph with its main operator Philippe Poulet (who was the inspiration for the project), and the credits for some of the key crew members. We are then introduced – in alphabetical order and with a short shot of each – to the protagonists of the film, the forty celebrated directors. The film opens with shots of some of the directors’ first encounters with the cinematograph – Gabriel Axel overawed by the experience exclaims ‘I feel like crossing myself’, while Theo Angelopoulos tenderly holds the box in his hands.



Les premiers pas de Bébé
(Lumière Brothers, 1897).

Right from the outset, then, the film works with metaphors and relationships that I shall explore in this essay. *Lumière & Company* is not unusual in proposing the metaphors of the 'life span' and, more specifically, of 'childhood' as a way to make sense of the past. Such metaphors inform most mainstream, commonsense versions of history: 'birth' and 'death' designations are routinely used in the historical narratives about civilizations, empires, nations, movements, art forms, and so on. The omnipresence of the metaphorical use of childhood in history lies in the power that it offers to master the object of study, to fix its origins and limits, to track and plot its developmental trajectory and to map it against an anthropocentric sense of time.

Mainstream film histories and forms of criticism are saturated with such metaphors: histories begin with the 'birth' of cinema, and critics debate the 'evolution of the language of cinema', or dismiss films as 'childish' and condemn audiences for 'naïve', 'childlike' behaviour. More intriguing, however, is the observation that some of the most sophisticated accounts of the early history of cinema seem to conform to (without being necessarily guided by) the 'childhood' metaphor. Take, for example, Tom Gunning's suggestion that early cinema is primarily a cinema of display, in which the cinematic apparatus (what, in the slightly different vocabulary of 1970s film theory can be called the 'symbolic')² is at the service of the image, and 'realism' is only a desired 'effect' that enhances the power of the display.³ Against that early stage, Gunning juxtaposes a later stage in which the primacy of attractions and display is put under the firm control of, and 'tamed' by, the narrative form. This corresponds neatly to the Lacanian scenario of the formation of identity in the infant, in which imaginary identifications precede the entry into the symbolic.⁴ Furthermore, in Gunning's suggestion that the cinema of attractions somehow survives (albeit in a suppressed way) in the primarily narrative-driven classical cinema, we can recognize the widely shared belief that childhood traits continue to exist inside every adult.

The above observations are not offered here as a critique of simplistic use of metaphor in the works of Gunning or Lacan – they are far too sophisticated for any such criticism. It is important to recognize, however, the extent and the degree to which cinema as an object of both historical and theoretical investigation is mirroring a narrative of human life structured around a childhood–adulthood polarity.

Child–adult relations

Even more explicitly than its historical metaphor of childhood, *Lumière & Company* is structured around a relationship between the present and the past. In fact the exploration of relations not only informs the referent and the themes of the film but also structures its textual and aesthetic practices.

² See Stephen Heath's definitions in his *Questions of Cinema* (London: Macmillan, 1981), esp. p. 105.

³ Tom Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', reprinted in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (New York, NY and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 818–32.

⁴ But that does not mean that the imaginary is really accessible in any other way than through the symbolic, something that also holds true for film. See, for example, Lacan's account in his seminar: 'If you think that the child is more captive of the imaginary than of the rest, you are right in a certain sense. The imaginary is there. But it is completely inaccessible to us. It is only accessible to us when we start from its realisations in the adult'. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I. Freud's Papers on Technique*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York, NY and London: Norton, 1991).

There are two interconnected strands of the relational structure of the film. Firstly, there exists in the text, and reinforced by the context, a historical level of homage, tribute, commemoration, celebration and exploration of the origins of cinema that goes hand in hand with an investigation into the contemporary state of cinema. The original Lumière footage, the short films contributed by the directors and the interviews with the directors are all components of this historical strand. The three questions posed in the interviews – ‘Why did you agree to do this?’ ‘Why do you make films?’ ‘Is cinema mortal?’ – directly address the contemporary moment, the Lumière shorts are evidence of the past, while the specially commissioned shorts mediate between the two.

The second strand of *Lumière & Company* is of a synchronic rather than diachronic nature, and is articulated textually as an exploration of the relationship between the featured directors and the short films they made, as it juxtaposes the interviews with shots of the making of the films and with the films themselves.

A number of relations, therefore, inform the film: the cinema of today compared to the cinema of 1895; the directors of today using the equipment of 1895; the films of Lumière remade today; the world of 1895 and the world of 1995; the filmmakers and early cinema; the filmmakers and what they film; the act of filming and the film. These relations, furthermore, are regulated. There are certain ‘rules of engagement’ in the project. Some of them are explicit, and viewers are informed of the ‘rules of the game’ at the outset of the film. They define the production limitations imposed on the participating directors: they have to use the cinematograph, their film has to be fifty-two seconds long, in one continuous take, and with no synchronous sound.

Not only, then, does *Lumière & Company* treat early cinema as a ‘child’, but it also places the directors in a ‘childlike’ position, inviting them to play a game, to ‘use the toys’ (as Patrice Leconte states early on in the film) and, in the process, to become ‘infected’ by the joy and innocence of the ‘child’ (early cinema) with which they share a game. It is interesting to note that many of the directors (including Miller, Rivette, Depardon, Hudson, Yoshida, Kaboré and Lee) made children into the main subject of their shorts – perhaps taking their cue from the ludic dimensions of the project as well as from the subject matter of several of the Lumière brothers’ films.

The positioning, however, of early cinema as a child (further reinforced by the film’s ability to invite ‘childlike’ behaviour on the part of the directors) contains the implication that the relationship between now and then, between filmmakers and cinema, is of a certain kind, and that it must, therefore, conform to some powerful, but not necessarily explicit, rules that pertain to adult–child relationships. Structuring this relationship as one between an adult and a child in many ways determines the sensibilities of the film. Loving, celebrating, caring, nurturing, protecting, securing the survival of the child that is cinema goes hand in hand with the rewards of recapturing innocence,

carelessness, joy and playfulness and with the burdens of responsibility, anxiety about the future and fear of death.

In this sense, the answers to the three questions posed in the interviews give the directors an opportunity to establish that their personal involvement will also follow the implicit rules of the game as determined by the nature of the child–adult relationship: they all maintain that their participation in the project is motivated not by material considerations but by curiosity, the desire to ‘play the game’, but above all by the love of cinema, a love that is reaffirmed, in various forms, through their personal accounts of what makes them want to make films. Speculation over the mortality of cinema inevitably leads to some of the most obvious clichés, but, beyond their individual answers, simply by being asked the question the directors are collectively placed as concerned guardians of cinema.

The historical perspective of the film, then, is heavily influenced by the child–adult relationship that informs its sensibility. As a result, history becomes heavily flavoured with emotions establishing that love and care from the ‘men of cinema’ (and the three token women directors) will hopefully guarantee the survival of the precious child that is cinema. In the next part of this essay I will discuss how such emotive appeal arises from a specifically European historical context.

Symbolic/imaginary relations

As described earlier, the synchronic textual strand of *Lumière & Company* is characterized by editing scenes of the making of the commissioned short pieces together with the actual films. Organized around segments bearing the name of the director responsible for each short piece, as well as the location of the shoot, *Lumière & Company* includes in each segment a shot or shots designed to capture the ‘moment’ and/or the context of the shooting of each individual short film.

Such textual practice clearly suggests that the film does not intend to be a transparent documentary concerned with the Lumière brothers and their cinema, but a text that will reveal, indeed celebrate, the process of its making. On most occasions, shots of the short film being made precede the actual film itself – the process of making coming before the display of the film being made. Importantly, the shots of filming are recorded with modern equipment, reflecting and amplifying the relational structure of the film.

To return to 1970s vocabulary, the film appears to work with a relationship between symbolic and imaginary that requires further investigation. In his analysis of the ‘imaginary signifier’ of cinema, Christian Metz elaborates on a distinction posed by Emile Benveniste between *discours* and *histoire*. In *discours*, the presence of the enunciator is felt and, as a result, what is enunciated clearly comes from an obvious, identifiable and ultimately subjective source. In *histoire*, however, the enunciated events are presented in a direct way that erases the signs of

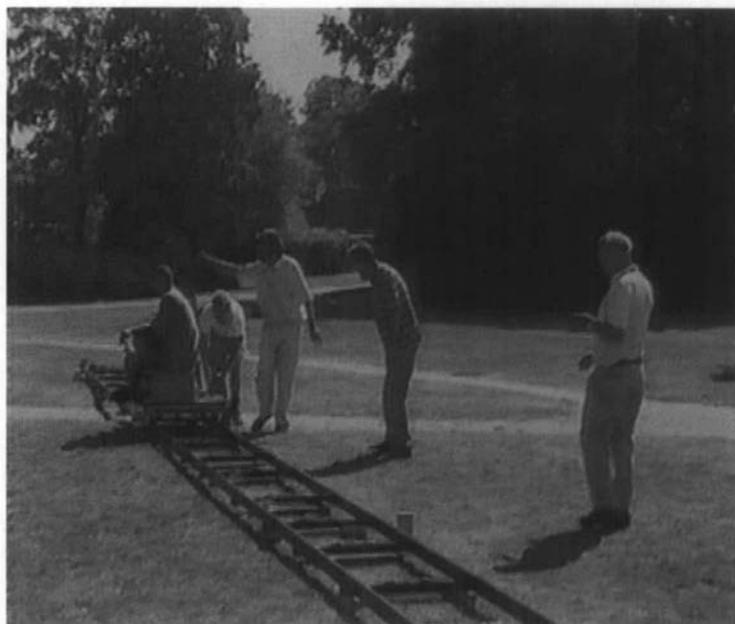
5 See Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (London: Macmillan, 1982), in particular 'Story/discourse (A note on two kinds of voyeurism)', pp. 91–8.

any possible enunciator: 'no one speaks here; the events seem to recount themselves'. Metz suggests that narrative cinema operates very much as *histoire*, although it is beyond doubt that the events and facts presented are carefully constructed and re-presented by the complex cinematic machinery. In other words, narrative cinema 'is presented as story (*histoire*) and not as discourse' – 'it obliterates all traces of enunciation and masquerades as story'.⁵

In opposition to Metz's description of mainstream narrative cinema, in which the symbolic conceals itself while controlling the apparently transparent imaginary, *Lumière & Company* indulges in a celebration of the symbolic. Not only does the film define as its privileged referent cinema itself, but in it filmmakers and the actual making of the films occupy centre stage. This is reinforced by the fact that a significant number of the short films themselves are about the act of making films.

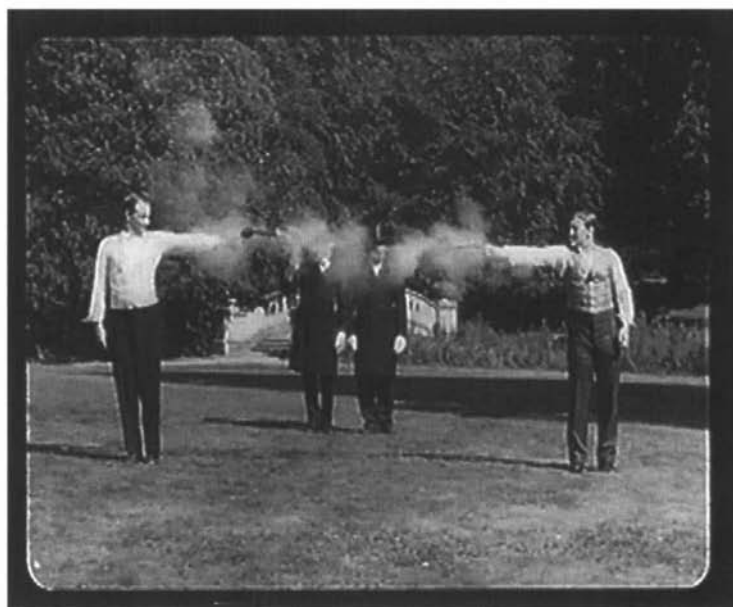
The segment entitled 'Gabriel Axel/Copenhagen', the second in the film and appearing about eight minutes from the start, provides a typical example of the structure of the segments. 'Gabriel Axel/Copenhagen' is very symmetrical, consisting of two shots of equal duration (each fifty-two seconds long).

The first shows the execution of a tracking shot, reframing when necessary so that the focus remains on the cinematograph, its operator, the crew operating the dolly, and the director Gabriel Axel. There is a lot of activity both in the shot and, importantly, outside it: we observe the hectic activities of the crew, the directions shouted by Axel and the movement of the camera that comes to a standstill towards the end of the shot, but we also see a person and, later, smoke entering the frame (both



'Gabriel Axel/Copenhagen', from
Lumière & Company (1995).

obviously migrating from the scene that is being shot, as their direction of movement suggests), and in fact the shot finishes using the smoke as a visual 'bridge' to a fade-out. The soundtrack is equally busy: there is string music throughout, the sound of two shots being fired (whose source remains, at this stage unknown), and we hear the instructions that Axel gives, the rolling of the camera and the cricking of the dolly.



'Gabriel Axel/Copenhagen', from
Lumière & Company (1995).

6 Although it remains debatable whether this is synchronous (thus violating the 'rules of the game') or recorded sound.

7 I emphasize the allegorical nature of the imaginary-symbolic divide; on the level of the film itself the same dichotomy operates across both shots. The specific segment offers a 'representational shorthand' of the binary, expressed as the relationship between the two shots.

The shot that emerges from the fadeout is Axel's cinematic contribution to the project. Not only does the second shot mirror the duration of the first, but its construction is also made transparent by the preceding shot. In turn, the second shot clarifies all the uncertainties and enigmas that surround the first. It opens with an image of a sculptor working on a statue; as the camera begins its tracking we see in succession the object of the sculpture (an archetypal representation of Hamlet's famous monologue), followed by two musicians playing the violin and the cello, a painter painting a ballet duet, a cinematographer, and a man approaching the camera holding the sign '7ème Art' (in the style of early cinema's intertitles). As the man disappears offscreen, the camera reaches its ultimate destination and remains static for the rest of the shot, which depicts a pistol duel resulting in the death of both opponents. The soundtrack includes diegetic and extradiegetic music; the first part repeats the string music of the previous shot, this time displaying its (diegetic) source,⁶ whereas the music accompanying the duel (the 'proper', in a sense, Lumière-like film) pastiches piano accompaniments of early cinema.

While there are several interesting observations one can make regarding directorial choices in this short film, I want to focus exclusively on the relationship between the two shots, in order to propose that the segment exemplifies *Lumière & Company's* attitude towards the relationship between film and filming, between images and sounds and the art/act of producing/recording them, and, in allegorical fashion, between the imaginary and the symbolic.⁷ The relationship is clearly unequal. Despite the fact that the second shot can be seen (in our allegorical scheme) as referring to the imaginary, it is overwhelmingly dominated by the symbolic. The symbolism involved in the shot is of less importance than the establishment of a position (the 'seventh') for cinema within the symbolic order of 'the arts', or the obsessive preoccupation with acts of representation in the display of sculpting, painting and filming, which in themselves reproduce the structure of the segment as they precede what is being sculpted, painted and filmed.

In such a scheme, the scene of the duel, appearing only at the final part of the segment and lasting less than twenty seconds, is treated by the film as a typical representation produced by the cinematograph, and thus as a conveniently archetypal example of early cinema. The relationship between imaginary and symbolic that emerges through this segment is clearly different from that attributed to mainstream narrative cinema by Metz et al., but is also, more importantly, distant and distinct from that attributed to early cinema by Gunning. Challenging, in effect, assumptions that since its birth cinema subordinated the imaginary by concealing its constructed nature through the concealed but all-powerful control of the symbolic, Gunning revises the commonly held views regarding spectatorial reactions during the 'mythical' first public

showing of *L'Arrivée d'un train à la Ciotat* in the Grand Café in 1895. Reminding us that such early shows often involved the temporary freezing of the image in order to maximize the impact of movement, he proposes:

Rather than mistaking the image for reality, the spectator is astonished by its transformation through the new illusion of projected motion. Far from credulity, it is the incredible nature of the illusion itself that renders the viewer speechless. What is displayed before the audience is less the impending speed of the train than the force of the cinematic apparatus. Or to put it better, the *one demonstrates the other*. The astonishment derives from a magical metamorphosis rather than a seamless reproduction of reality. . . . As in the magic theatre the apparent realism of the image makes it a successful illusion but one understood as an illusion nonetheless.⁸

⁸ Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment', pp. 822–3 (emphasis mine).

It is interesting to compare the relationship of mutuality between symbolic and imaginary, suggested above, with the allegorical one of 'Gabriel Axel/Copenhagen'. In the latter, the act of display (and the pleasures associated with it) is subordinate to a hermeneutic structure that privileges processes of interpretation and explanation. The symbolism of the short film needs to be decoded but, more importantly, what the two shots display only makes sense through an understanding and appreciation of the art of making a film. The relationship between on- and offscreen sound, space and performance is articulated in such a way that awareness of the process of the creation of the 'illusion' (the short film about cinema as 'seventh art') takes precedence over the film itself. No concessions to 'apparent realism' (that, as Gunning suggests, informs and supports the illusion) are made, and the enigmas that the segment poses are all answered through an understanding and appreciation of the process of filmmaking.

Compared to the sophisticated and complex use of cinematic space, the cross-referencing, self-referentiality and intertextuality of the rest of the segment, the short film-within-the-film-within-the-film (the duel) is startling in its simplicity and naivete. Such an approach is not exclusive to Axel – the vast majority of the films that the featured directors give birth to, using the 'sacred' equipment of the Lumière brothers, are in many ways a 'junior partner'. Framed as personal visions of the celebrated auteurs, the films are limited, shorter pieces, bracketed by big questions about the nature and future of cinema, overshadowed by the spectacular displays of the masters at work, inviting comparisons and interpretations in terms of the directors' 'real' *oeuvre*. The images born in that way are marked as technically simple, aesthetically unsophisticated, playful, but ultimately naive views of the world. Within such a relationship, 'early cinema' emerges as fragile, innocent and childlike, viewed from a 'grownup' perspective and addressed in 'grownup' terms.

'Naughty' players, disputed childhoods

As is perhaps the case with all games, not every participant follows the 'rules' in *Lumière & Company*. Some of the explicit rules are openly violated by Peter Greenaway and David Lynch, for example, who made multi-shot films. One suspects that artistic licence is granted in the case of some of the world's best directors. It is worth exploring, however, some more ambiguous infringements of the rules.

The 'cinema as child' metaphor has some additional discursive implications. First of all it implies uniqueness, individuality and purity, and in that respect isolates cinema from other forms of art, entertainment and culture. Michael Hanneke's short film, *Extract from the TV News, March 19, 1995, Birthday of the First Shot of March 19, 1895*, consists of in-camera edited extracts of a television programme. The film tests the limits of the explicit 'rules of the game': Does in-camera editing qualify as a continuous shot? Is the filming of a television programme cinema? Is a film with television as a referent appropriate for this project? The responses to such questions matter less than the fact that, by centralizing as its theme the cinema–television relationship, the short film challenges and disputes cinema's pure genealogy.

Secondly, and more importantly, childhood implies a common origin and a shared future. Cinema is our child, everybody's child – the Lumière brothers are everybody's cinematic ancestors. The segment 'Spike Lee/Brooklyn' shows the director setting up the cinematograph and addressing offscreen his daughter Satchel, encouraging her to say something. The short film that follows is a medium shot of Satchel sitting in a pram, just about managing to say 'dada' at the end of the fifty-two seconds. Reminiscent (and clearly a pastiche) of several of the films of the Lumière brothers (most obviously *Repas de bébé*, which shows August Lumière, his wife and his baby daughter having breakfast) the film has a startling effect. The overwhelming whiteness of the cinema of the Lumière brothers, the cultural, ethnic, class and racial specificity of their films, of the ancestors of cinema, becomes apparent. Difference enters the frame by the simple presence of Satchel in the shot. Not the difference that Laconte seeks to capture in his remake of *L'Arrivée d'un train à la Ciotat* – a difference of time, the passage of a linear history, that returns to the same (place, mode, moment) in order to understand difference – but a profound disputation and rejection of shared origins and common histories. Lee's daughter is a different child, a child that early cinema left out, a child whose childhood cannot be mapped against and parallel a 'childhood' of cinema posed as universal. Questions of difference are also raised by most of the non-western filmmakers, who seem to ask questions that have thoroughly escaped the attention, even the consciousness, of their European counterparts. If cinema is a child, whose child is it? How shared is cinema's childhood?

In Merzak Allouach's short film, a dispute breaks out between an Algerian man and his female companion about who will occupy the film

Merzak Allouach, from *Lumière & Company* (1995).



frame. Ultimately the man uses all his patriarchal authority to literally force the woman out of the shot. For Allouach, therefore, representation is a struggle, not a natural, automatic and birth-given right.

Idrissa Ouedraogo stages an elaborate pastiche of *L'Arroseur arrosé* using an utterly exoticized set complete with native 'costumes' and the practical joker disguised as a crocodile. The irony of the scene spills into

Youssef Chahine, from *Lumière & Company* (1995).



the context of the shooting: not only does Ouedraogo flout the rules by allowing for four takes ('tell them that here, in Burkina Faso, with the soldiers, we do four takes') but also tells his crew off for 'tiring the white man' (the cinematograph's operator Philippe Poulet).

The exoticism and objectification permeating early cinema is also openly satirized in Youssef Chahine's short, in which the camera of two cinematographers (Lu and Mière, as the writing on their waistcoats states) is smashed by a dark shadowy figure (a 'native'?) emerging from the Pyramids. Challenging orientalist representations, Zhang Yimou shows a young couple by the Great Wall of China shedding their traditional (Beijing Opera-style) clothes for modern pop-group attire. By contrast, such questioning of objectification is totally lost in Alain Corneau's film, in which a dancer performs a traditional Indian dance with her costume spectacularly changing colours.⁹

The handful of non-western directors invited to join in the celebration of the centenary of the birth of cinema therefore appear to play a slightly different game, that involves a clear (if playful) challenge of a discourse that, in typically European and Eurocentric fashion, perceives the history of cinema in a universalizing, totalizing humanist way.

The love of cinema

Paraphrasing Foucault, we can argue that the film's historical look says more about the present than about the past. By structuring its historicism as a child–adult relationship, the film sets up an emotional tone that is heavily informed by the very intense anxieties surrounding the survival of the European film industry in the early 1990s, a decade after audiences hit a historical low. It is also heavily influenced by a specific kind of European cinephilia (the tagline of the film was 'A declaration of love for cinema'), exemplified in the writing of *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s and 60s. Such 'love of cinema' was defined as a very serious affair, and one that revolved primarily around favourite texts and directors as well as a fetishization of the creative process of making a film. Numerous European films of the 1980s and early 1990s, which indulge in nostalgic lamentations of the 'death' of cinema, offer clear examples of such cinephilia.¹⁰ Perhaps the most memorable and celebrated case is *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (Giuseppe Tornatore, Italy/France, 1988) a film that articulates the anxiety about the future of cinema around the changing nature of exhibition.¹¹ The film foregrounds another crucial aspect of cinephilia, namely the association of the love of cinema with the cinephile's childhood experiences – in such narratives, cinema seems naturally to appeal to the child that every adult has once been.

It is startling, nevertheless, that in *Lumière & Company*, a film that appears to have the institution of cinema as its subject, there is scarcely a reference to, or even acknowledgment of, spectators and audiences – but there are two notable exceptions, both with negative connotations. In Francis Girod's short film, a cross is painted on the screen of a huge

9 Corneau's film, nevertheless, demonstrates early cinema's obsession with the exotic. Gunning argues: 'The enormous popularity of foreign views (already developed and exploited by the stereoscope and magic lantern) expresses an almost unquenchable desire to consume the world through images. The cinema was, as the slogan of an early film company put it, an invention which put the world within your grasp'. Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment', p. 828.

10 For example, *E la nave va/And the Ship Sails On* (Federico Fellini, France/Italy, 1983), *Ginger e Fred/Ginger and Fred* (Federico Fellini, Italy, 1986), *Intervista* (Federico Fellini, Italy, 1987), *Good Morning Babilonia/Good Morning Babylon* (Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, Italy/France/USA, 1987), *Splendor* (Ettore Scola, France/Italy, 1988), and after 1988, *Ladri di saponette/The Icicle Thief* (Maurizio Nichetti, Italy, 1989), *Caro diario/Dear Diary* (Nanni Moretti, France/Italy, 1994), *L'uomo delle stelle/The Star Maker* (Giuseppe Tornatore, Italy, 1995).

11 For a detailed discussion of *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso*, European cinéphilia and anxieties around exhibition see Dimitris Eleftheriotis, 'Exhibition: the apparatus meets the audience', in *Popular Cinemas of Europe: Studies of Texts, Contexts and Frameworks* (New York, NY and London: Continuum, 2001).

television set; a group of people, magically attracted by the set, stand in front of it still desperately trying to watch the obscured image. At another point, Hugh Hudson, answering the question 'is cinema mortal?', directly and rather aggressively addresses the camera: 'it will die if you let it die'. Such aggression towards spectators/audience ('deserters' of cinema seduced by television) is the 'other' side of a European cinephilia that perceives cinema as a sophisticated form of pleasure appreciated only by a limited elite.

The privileging of the symbolic over the imaginary by *Lumière & Company*, discussed earlier, can therefore be placed within the critical/theoretical tradition of the 'apparatus theory'. Metz, for example, is unambiguously hostile towards (and at times fearful of) the imaginary signifier of narrative cinema:

The work of the symbolic, in the theoretician who would delimit the share of the imaginary and that of the symbolic in the cinema, is always in danger of being swallowed up in the very imaginary which is sustained by the cinema, which makes the film likeable, and which is thus the instigation for the theoretician's very existence (= 'the desire to study the cinema', to use more ordinary terms).¹²

One can clearly sense Metz's agony as his love for cinema makes him vulnerable to its seductive power. Importantly, Gunning unveils Metz's contempt for the 'credulous' spectator (who succumbs to the imaginary seduction of cinema) with specific reference to the 'primal scene' of cinema, the historic Grand Café show, explicitly addressing Metz's 'childhood' metaphor:

Metz's admirable subtlety tenders his analysis all the more deficient from a historical point of view. Metz describes this panicked reaction on the part of the Grand Café audience as a displacement of the contemporary viewer's credulity onto a mythical childhood of the medium. Like the childhood when one still believed in Santa Claus, like the dawn of time when myths were still believed literally, belief in this legendary audience, Metz claims, allows us to disavow our own belief in the face of the cinema. *We* don't believe in the screen image in the manner that *they* did. Our credulity is displaced onto an audience from the infancy of cinema.¹³

Metz's cinephilia is riddled with contradictions: the love of cinema needs to be 'tamed' and cinema needs to be unmasked for its seductive ideological power, the credulous spectator needs to grow up into a sophisticated cinephile. Importantly, the narrative of the emblematic *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* involves a similar (albeit painful) growing up: the story is narrated from the point of view of an adult Toto, whose childhood viewing experiences are the source of the film's nostalgia. Toto has to grow up, to leave behind his small town and the pleasures linked to a specific (and by now dead) venue in order to become a 'proper man of cinema', a well-known producer/director. Similarly, in *Lumière &*

¹² Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, p. 5.

¹³ Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment', p. 819.

¹⁴ See, for example, the conclusion of the document '100 Years of Cinema in Europe', prepared especially for the cinema's centenary by Mediasalles: 'For many European countries cinema attendances since the mid-eighties have stabilised, if not gone up, during the last five years. This development went parallel with investment in refurbishing existing cinemas and the building of new complexes. At first sight, it seems a positive trend to the benefit of European exhibition. But even a cursory glance will reveal shifting economic patterns that affect European national film industries as a whole and European cinema exhibition in particular. Investment by (foreign) conglomerates, horizontal and vertical integration and changing government policies affect the industry deeply, if in a sometimes obscure way. Will the European exhibition industry survive, and in what form?' URL: http://www.mediasalles.it/ybkcent/ybk95_hi.htm [accessed 31 May 2005].

Company the love of cinema is conditional, requiring a development, a growing up that takes cinema away from its early childlike naivete and simplicity. The cinephile to whom the film appeals needs to be addressed not in terms of a spectacular display of images but through an awareness of mechanisms, not as a credulous child delving into the imaginary but as an incredulous connoisseur appreciating self-reflexivity and deconstructing the workings of the symbolic.

Cinema's mythical childhood becomes the subject of contested theoretical and historical approaches that, as Gunning powerfully suggests, often exploit its assumed childlike powerlessness in order to produce controlling discursive accounts of different types of cinema and spectatorship. Similarly, the child's agency is framed by a multiplicity of anxious custodians and interpreted within a number of legal, ethical, psychoanalytical and political (to mention but a few) frameworks. Such ambivalence is characteristic of European attitudes towards childhood. Romanticized for its anarchic freedom, innocence, and ability to see the world with fresh eyes, childhood is at the same time the object of the most incessant discursive and institutional attempts to contain and control it. What is most treasured and celebrated about human life must also succumb to discursive control. *L'Arroseur arrosé* offers a perfect example of this modern (and European) ambivalence: the child's naughtiness that provides the comedic pleasures of the film needs to be curtailed by the act of administering discipline, as the child's agency is simultaneously celebrated and chastised by the film.

Yet the obsessive nature and hectic activity of controlling discourses and institutions suggests anxiety about their effectiveness. Loss of control and discursive chaos surface again and again in this context. By imagining early cinema as a child, *Lumière & Company* strives to set implicit and explicit limits on the discourse on cinema. However, as analyzed above, not everybody is willing to play by the rules. Inviting the directors to play with the cinematograph (in a childlike fashion) has enabled several transgressions that expose the Eurocentricism and elitism of the controlling discourse. It has also brought to attention the anxiety of a very European love of cinema around two sensitive issues in the mid 1990s. Firstly, the dependency of cinema for its survival on multiplex¹⁴ (a venue that sends a chill down the spine of every European cinephile); secondly, the slow realization that the role of revitalizing and shaping the future of cinema is no more the exclusive right of European auteurs but has become increasingly linked to the vibrant, hybrid cinematic traditions of many other parts of the world.

Children, emotion and viewing in contemporary European film

EMMA WILSON

News programmes in spring 2004 showed images of Sabine Dardenne who, together with Laetitia Delhez, survived abduction by Marc Dutroux and returned to confront him in court eight years later. Photographs of the child Sabine on her release from Dutroux's prison were cross-cut with images of the barely adult woman, her pale blonde hair linking both sets of images. The cross-cutting of such images reveals in elliptical form the proximity, the resemblance, between the child victim and the adult survivor, the short distance crossed between (traumatic) childhood and adulthood. These images of Sabine Dardenne – and the messages of support posted to her by women on the internet – have led me to think further about the representation of children's suffering and the questions of emotion and viewing raised therein. I have written elsewhere on the issue of the missing child as represented in contemporary narrative cinema.¹ While missing child films contend with childhood and its meanings, with child suffering, and a very complex nexus of emotions (mourning primarily, but also nostalgia and desire), they have less to say on the embodied experience of childhood (abusive or otherwise) or on the complex emotions of children themselves as they face their own mortality or survival. Such issues are however being addressed in contemporary cinema, and it is to such alternative representations that I turn here, in search of films which show me, or remind me, what children feel, how child emotions resemble and subtend their adult counterparts.

My thinking here is indebted to Martha Nussbaum's *Upheavals of Thought*, which outlines an argument for seeing the emotions as part of systems of ethical reasoning.² She writes: 'a central part of developing an adequate ethical theory will be to develop an adequate theory of the

1 Emma Wilson, *Cinema's Missing Children* (London: Wallflower Press, 2003).

2 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: the Intelligence of the Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

3 Ibid., p. 2.

4 Ibid., pp. 230, 6.

5 Ibid., p. 12.

6 Nussbaum's more philosophical project tends in a different direction; she identifies instead 'a central role for the arts in human self-understanding: for narrative artworks of various kinds (whether musical or visual or literary) give us information about these emotion-histories that we could not easily get otherwise'. Ibid., p. 236 (emphasis mine).

7 Henry Jenkins, *The Children's Culture Reader* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998), p. 2.

8 See James Kincaid, *Child-Loving: the Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (New York NY: Routledge, 1992) and *Erotic Innocence: the Culture of Child Molesting* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1998). On painting, photography and advertising, see Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: the History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998); Patricia Holland *Picturing Childhood: the Myth of the Child in Popular Imagery* (London: IB Tauris, 2004). The wide range of papers on children and film at the Screen Studies Conference, Glasgow University, July 2004, also testifies to the wealth and breadth of work currently being pursued in the field with specific reference to film.

emotions, including their cultural sources, their history in infancy and childhood'.³ For Nussbaum, in emotive response the distance between childhood and adulthood is crossed: 'the childhood history of emotions shapes adult emotional life'. The foundations of emotions are laid down in earlier life in initial 'experiences of attachment, need, delight, and anger', and early memories 'shadow later perceptions of objects, adult attachment relations bear the traces of infantile love and hate'.⁴ This dense involvement of emotive responses with vestiges of our early histories, Nussbaum argues, accounts for the ways in which emotions may unsettle the adult subject. She writes: 'emotions reveal us as vulnerable to events we do not control'.⁵ Her words invoke loss or lack of control in two senses here. Her primary concern is with the adult subject's faltering in the face of a response to emotion which is in part unbidden, involuntary, and which draws its force from its mnemonic underpinning; she writes vividly about such experiences and the discomfort they provoke. Such experiences are not only disarming in themselves, however, and it is here that Nussbaum's second notion of lack of control becomes evident. Emotions felt, remembered by an adult temporarily dispossessed, also recall a child's (more extensive) lack of control over its circumstances, its environment, even at times over its own body. The adult, overwhelmed by experience, by emotions of intensity of either negative or positive affect, in the very experience of being overwhelmed involuntarily returns to the child's state of helplessness (motor, emotional or political).

This experience – the sense of involuntary emotion, the deprivation, the lack of mastery – is courted and created in the works of certain filmmakers as they contend with the representation and situation of children in contemporary society. Moving away from Nussbaum,⁶ we may wonder about the efficacy (as well as affect) of such moments of sensation and recall as we pursue our adult lives and open ourselves to emotive engagements with works of art. In moving the adult, in disarming her through the involuntary seizure of the emotions, in restoring momentarily an awareness of helplessness, works of art may sensitize the viewer to the experience (and suffering) of children and so engage her more voluntarily, changing her perspective on childhood.

In *The Children's Culture Reader*, Henry Jenkins comments that until recently cultural studies has had little to say about the politics of childhood. He suggests that work is needed both to explore 'what the figure of the child means to adults' and 'to offer a more complex account of children's own cultural lives';⁷ his work, along with that of James Kincaid, Anne Higonnet, Patricia Holland and others, has been moving to address these questions.⁸ Initially such work has been more concerned with Jenkins's first question, with unraveling what children and childhood mean to adults (both within and beyond the family). This process of reflection, a self-consciousness about the cultural positioning of children and their specific vulnerability to the projection of (adult) fantasies, is necessary before a further approach can be made to

representations of children's own experiences and sensations (which is my focus here).

Also key to this deconstructive process, this questioning of what the figure of the child means to adults, has been an interrogation of, and distancing from, questions of childhood innocence: innocence emerges as the dominant fantasy in whose terms children have been variously represented, protected and desired. This fantasy in itself has been seen as in part responsible for the very disempowerment of the child (that loss or lack of control of which Nussbaum speaks). Jenkins suggests that the 'dominant conception of childhood innocence presumes that children exist in a space beyond, above, outside the political'.⁹ Keeping children outside the political, the conception or fantasy of childhood innocence works further to shore up a sense of the distinction and distance between adults and children. Holland writes with reference to representations of child suffering: 'pictures of sorrowing children reinforce the defining characteristics of childhood – dependence and powerlessness'; 'As [children] reveal their vulnerability, viewers long to protect them'; 'The boundaries between childhood and adulthood are reinforced as the image gives rise to pleasurable emotions of tenderness and compassion, which satisfactorily confirm adult power'.¹⁰ For Holland, tracing normative responses, 'Pictures of childhood distress are judged in the light of adult experience'; with a different emphasis from Nussbaum, she suggests 'Uneasy promptings from our childhood selves tend to be repressed'.¹¹

Countering the tradition identified by Holland, contemporary films seek to open up the representation of children, strategically denying the distinct division between adults and children, provoking a seizure of emotive response, where adults suddenly *feel* like children. Regression is not an aim here; rather, politically, filmmakers address and undermine the power relations which have existed between adults and children. These questions are urgent, and interesting, in a time of changed kinship relations, a time in which childhood and its meanings (imposed and experienced) have also changed, both externally and internally. Judith Butler, in *Antigone's Claim*, describes the contemporary era as:

a time in which children, because of divorce and remarriage, because of migration, exile and refugee status, because of global displacements of various kinds, move from one family to another, move from a family to no family, move from no family to a family, or in which they live, psychically, at the crossroads of the family, or in multiply layered family situations, in which they may well have more than one woman who operates as the mother, more than one man who operates as the father, or no mother or no father.¹²

For Butler, child experience is still dependent on adult connection and interrelation, though it is newly impermanent, in transition, as families are made and unmade more readily, as displacements of various kinds become available or mandatory. The stability and structure of the nuclear

9 Jenkins, *The Children's Culture Reader*, p. 2.

10 Holland, *Picturing Childhood*, pp. 143–4.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 160.

12 Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 22.

13 This privileging of the parental point of view vis-à-vis representations of children is found too, though differently, in Carol Mavor's two studies of photography: *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss in Victorian Photographs* (London: IB Tauris, 1996) and *Becoming: the Photographs of Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1999). In her sensitive readings of photographs taken by Julia Margaret Cameron, Clementina, Viscountess Hawarden, Sally Mann and others, Mavor certainly looks across the adult-child divide and explores the ambiguities of merger and eroticism she finds therein, yet she writes avowedly as a mother, and rarely pauses to recall, or imagine, the response of the child (or of herself as child).

14 Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 27.

15 The films of Moodysson may be associated with the attention to children in Scandinavian cinema, witnessed in the work of Ingmar Bergman and, more recently, in a film such as Liv Ullmann's *Faithless* (2000), or in the foregrounding of children, actual, recalled or phantom, in the work of Lars von Trier and other Dogma directors. Veyssset's work connects to a broader strand of French filmmaking where, in the work of women directors (Martine Dugowson, Noémie Lvovsky), female child identity has been foregrounded.

family is undone, offering, apparently, both new freedom and new insecurity at once, a new politics of childhood, a new recognition of the imbrication of children's lives with the political on a domestic and global scale.

This unsettling, and opening, of kinship relations may also be instructive for thinking about how the viewer relates to the child represented in film. For Holland, referring to the pictorial, the adult viewer's relation to the child represented is (tacitly) parental, in the protective stance adopted and in the shoring up of adult-child boundaries.¹³ My interest in the representation of children and my own childless state cause me to reflect on what other (non-sexual) relations to children (imaged) may be imagined. What types of identification with children on screen are possible? Can viewing be open to an inbetween position, a position of alignment with a child, a sharing of her response, yet a refusal of infantilization, on the one hand, or parental responsibility and distancing on the other? Can the viewer operate as other than child or mother, or as both at once? In *Family Secrets*, Annette Kuhn, analyzing her response to re-viewing the film *Mandy* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1952), asks: 'How does a film scholar deal with a child's response to a film?'; 'What exactly is the difference between these responses, the child's and the adult's? Are they irreconcilable, or can they be brought together in our attempts to understand how films work, how they engage our feelings and our fantasies?'.¹⁴ These are questions I open for debate once more in the particular context of contemporary representations of children in film.

I interweave here discussion of recent films of two European directors, Lukas Moodysson and Sandrine Veysset. *Lilya 4-ever* (2003) and *Martha ... Martha* (2001) are representative of a current trend in European cinema, but beyond this Moodysson and Veysset are not connected.¹⁵ Their films coincide, however, in their attempts to offer new representations of a child's subjectivity, new filmic apprehensions, or imprints, of child identities. In their move to mould the medium to child perceptions, they each independently make use of certain tropes and devices which can be isolated and latterly associated with child subjectivity, and they each in turn attempt to shock the (adult) viewer emotively, to break down the division between the viewer and the children viewed, to bring the viewer up close to the image, disallowing distance. Both directors, avoiding the pictorialization of the child, make use of cinema's potential to evoke touch, the tactile, the haptic, drawing attention thus to space, its navigation and inhabitation, kinesthesia and containment, cocooning.

In three of his feature films to date, Moodysson focuses on transitions between childhood and adulthood, treating subjects which reflect the diversity of kinship relations identified above. *Show Me Love* (1998) shows Agnes, within the nuclear family, learning to live in relation to her sexuality. *Together* (2000), representing a commune, shows children uprooted by their parents' desires, with new markers of identity adopted

16 With reference to these two earlier films, Julian Graffy writes: 'one of Moodysson's major achievements in these acute and compassionate films is to give those not invited to the feast of community – in particular two friendless teenage girls – a chance to articulate their despair to a sympathetic listener'. 'Trading places', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 13, no. 4 (2003), pp. 20–22.

17 Ibid., p. 22.

18 Where the subject of *Lilya 4-ever* may seem excessive or exorbitant with relation to Moodysson's earlier treatment of childhood and adolescence, throughout his films to date we find similar images of adolescents raiding drugs cabinets, contemplating suicide, bullying one another, screaming, vomiting, gesturing and dreaming with comparable energy and delirium. *Lilya 4-ever* refuses to make Lilya's life exceptional in its manner of presentation, in its rhythm, its quotidian detail; we are drawn instead to imagine and protest against the exploitation and trafficking of a normal teenager.

19 *Guardian* film interview with Danny Leigh at the National Film Theatre, London, 20 November 2002. Text available at URL: <http://film.guardian.co.uk/interview/interviewpages/0,6737,848248,00.html>.

20 For further discussion of Veysset, see Carrie Tarr with Brigitte Rollet, *Cinema of the Second Sex* (London: Continuum, 2001), pp. 113–15.

21 Veysset's second film, *Victor ... pendant qu'il est trop tard* (1998), also traces the life of a child who has experienced a traumatic childhood.

22 Giuliana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film* (New York, NY: Verso, 2002), p. 2.

in a constantly shifting home environment.¹⁶ *Lilya 4-ever*, Moodysson's most passionate and political film to date, a film of 'eloquent fury',¹⁷ shows a Russian child or adolescent, Lilya, caught up in the sex trade following her mother's departure for America.¹⁸ In a *Guardian* interview, provided on the UK DVD edition of the film, Moodysson speaks about his commitment to children and the politics of representation. He admits that 'feelings and emotions in the film come close to what I've felt myself'; he encourages the audience 'not to forget the person you were when you were at eight or 15'.¹⁹ Moodysson claims *Lilya 4-ever* here as overtly political, the film's credits dedicating it 'to the millions of children around the world exploited by the sex trade'.

Sandrine Veysset came to public attention with her first feature, *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?* (1996) which, again recalling Butler, represents relations between a single mother and her seven children in rural France.²⁰ The children work on a farm owned by their father, who has another family and an exploitative relationship with his common-law wife and all his children, recently manifested in the abuse of his eldest daughter. Veysset does not single out one child's experience or subjectivity here; she looks instead towards a collective inscription of a family unit and privileges the mother's perspective. She complicates her work, and her sense of the division between childhood and adulthood, in *Martha ... Martha*, which gives fairly equal perceptual space to a mother, Martha, and to her child, Lise.²¹ Lise is a child of a travelling family; like Moodysson's Lilya, Lise moves in and between spaces whose meanings are politically charged and culturally diverse.

Butler has drawn attention to material changes in circumstance and experiences of displacement – in particular 'migration, exile and refugee status' – which more or less describe the experiences of Lilya as she moves between Russia and Sweden, and of Lise as she moves, within France, between various temporary homes. Concrete and politically charged, this uprooting of the (child) self also encompasses and generates, as Butler suggests, new psychic perceptions of mobile, multidirectional family situations. The child's perception of self, home and space are altered as much as her material circumstances. The double-stranded reflection on migration and exile as embodied experience and as (changing) state of mind, is significant to these films which make migration material, and consider its rhythms and jolts, its affect and velocity, in the frame of experience of a child, a small subject in transition, moving towards adulthood.

Giuliana Bruno, looking at film and the visual arts, has extensively envisaged the relation between touch and emotion, in particular as the two relate to contact and navigation through space. Looking at Madeleine de Scudéry's map of the emotions, she writes that 'emotion materialises as a moving topography'.²² This materialization of the affective as a topography draws attention to the movement, the motion, that already inheres in the word *emotion* (as Bruno reminds us 'the meaning of emotion ... is historically associated with "a moving out,

23 Ibid., p. 6.

24 Ibid.

25 In this respect, the film bears comparison with Joshua Marston's *Maria Full of Grace* (2004) which also shows a young woman's border crossing, her passage into a first-world economy, internally, viscerally, here through a drama of ingestion, as her body is trafficked as receptacle.

26 Moodysson speaks of his desire in his filming to protect both his actress and his protagonist, Lilya, as a person, absenting her, for example, from the film's repeat sex scenes, creating (ironically) a closeness precisely to her experience, showing what she saw, what she felt, not how she looked.

27 In her paper, 'Spectatorship and the violent child: Butcher Boy in the City of God', at the 2004 Screen Studies Conference, Marsha Kinder drew attention to the difficulties of identification with the violent child. In *Lilya 4-ever*, Moodysson attempts to bring us close to a child who is emotionally violent, yet also a victim of her family and social circumstance.

28 In the image used to advertise the film, Lilya has made herself up with pink lip-gloss and a fake blonde ponytail. In the film narrative, the image is quickly cut up, however; we see Lilya throwing up after she first sells her body and walking back home with her ponytail in her hand. After the gloss of her first image, as she makes herself up subsequently she seems each time more smudged and dazed. Once in Sweden, she is told she looks like shit, but her image seems of little importance as she is brutally hustled from apartment to apartment, female meat in a monetary exchange. Despite the brutality of the film's subject there are, however, barely any shots of the actress naked or physically damaged, as the film visually resists the exploitation it represents.

29 In his paper, 'The adolescent prostitute in film', at the 2004 Screen Studies Conference,

migration, transference from one place to another").²³ In conjoining movement through space with affective movement, the transports of the emotions, Bruno draws out the notion of the haptic and contact, writing: 'haptic means "able to come into contact with"'. As a function of the skin, then, the haptic – the sense of touch – constitutes the reciprocal *contact* between us and the environment, both housing and extending communicative interface. But the haptic is also related to kinesthesia, the ability of our bodies to sense their own movement in space.²⁴

Lilya 4-ever is a film which, in an urban landscape, maps a tender geography of Lilya's emotions (pain, terror, shame, love, exhilaration); the journeys of the film pass through the fabric of her body. *Lilya 4-ever* is a film about trafficking, about the removal of a child to another country, to entrapment in a vicious sexual economy. Rightly, then, it makes movement one of its central motifs.²⁵ Through hand-held camerawork, through the proximity between Lilya and the camera, Moodysson makes vision, a moving viewpoint and a moving body coincide; sharing Lilya's vector through the film, we experience the emotions it produces.²⁶ Moodysson offers an apprehension of her presence which is visceral, vulnerable, urgent.²⁷ In creating a new representation of a child sex-worker, *Lilya 4-ever* works to displace pictorial and cinematic conventions in which the child is either idealized as a picture of innocence or eroticized as miniature object of desire.²⁸ In his naming of his protagonist – 'Lilja' means 'lily' in Swedish – Moodysson may allude to Martin Scorsese's child prostitute Iris in *Taxi Driver* (1976), or Louis Malle's Violet in *Pretty Baby* (1978), yet it is quickly apparent that *Lilya 4-ever* will eschew the pictorial angelicization of Scorsese's or Malle's working children.²⁹

Movement, key to the embodied, visceral representation of Lilya, is also linked with removal in the film. In emphasizing tactility and contact, Moodysson pays close attention to Lilya's acts of wrapping and unpacking her possessions. The filming of her picture of a child and guardian angel gains pathos as we see the image painstakingly wrapped in Lilya's clothes, a ribbed lilac polo neck, a blue striped sweater. Her protective gestures as she buffers her few possessions, her moves to clear and order each more desperate space she enters, speak of her own vulnerability, her wish to house and shroud herself, her bid to shape the texture of her habitable space. Through movement and the tactile, through the range of emotions summoned, Moodysson seeks to reattach us to child experience, to make its affect and range of sensation present for us. This strategy emphasizes film as a more than visual medium, its representation of children as more than pictorial.

In *Martha . . . Martha*, Lise's parents are market workers with a second-hand clothes stall: pieced-together fabrics and discarded garments make up the material of their existence. This is a resource to the filmmaker as, despite the verisimilitude of the film's images of their marginal and economically restricted existence, almost every shot contains new textures and colours. Nothing matches, but this play of

Russell Campbell drew attention to this 'floral' naming of these young girls.

30 Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. xi.

31 Laura U. Marks, *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minnesota, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. xii. Such a 'haptic' experience is evoked at the start of *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*, in a scene compared by Tarr and Rollet to 'a home movie', tracking 'the children messing about in the womblike, maternal spaces of the barn'. *Cinema of the Second Sex*, p. 115. The handheld camera is just above the children's eye-level as it moves through the barn. There is no mapping or perspective as it follows first one child then another. Insistently Veysset cuts the distance between the viewer and the children. The film approaches an impression of their tactile reality, in the sensory reflections of the golden straw and hair, the children's skin and the soft colours of their clothes, in their contact with the space around them, with each other.

fabrics, the blending of clothes and cloth, creates a childlike, collaged, dressing-up world. Lise herself has the air of a child always in borrowed clothes. Her clothes work in particular to stress her tactile, sensory presence. In her first appearance in the film she is asleep, bundled up by her father and put to bed. Frequently we see her cradled, swaddled in blankets, her sleeping face against the matted fur fabric of her anorak lining. Veysset stresses the child's contact with her environment, the fact that her apprehension of her own body is tactile, not specular or spectacular. Such images of transitory physical comfort also convey pathos in the viewer's perception of the jolts and discontinuities of Lise's existence.

In *The Skin of the Film*, Laura U. Marks explores questions of the haptic and of touch in intercultural cinema. She is interested in the ways that film or video can signify through their materiality, through a contact between perceiver and object viewed.³⁰ Explaining her use of the term 'haptic', she writes:

Touching, not mastering. The term *haptic* emerges in Deleuze and Guattari's description of 'smooth space', a space that must be moved through by constant reference to the immediate environment, as when navigating an expanse of snow or sand. Close-range spaces are navigated not through reference to the abstractions of maps or compasses, but by haptic perception which attends to their particularity.³¹

The refusal of mapping, overview or mastery may be aligned with Nussbaum's notion of the loss of control recalled for the adult in the seizure of the emotions. Marks identifies haptic images in cinema and video, in particular images in closeup, images where the viewer is disoriented by her failure to master the object viewed. Moodysson and Veysset, in their camerawork, in their breaking down of distance and their large-scale focus on texture and touch, on movement, removal and spatial disorientation, recall such visual experiments. The effect of their work depends on our embodied knowledge of sensory and specifically childhood experience. These mobile images refuse to let us deny our own past vulnerability as children, and the (involuntary) insistence of a child's emotion and sensation in adult response. This I explore in closer readings of scenes from the two films.

Before we see Lilya, we see from her point of view, on a death run which encircles the film and defines its despairing, brute ethos. The pace and blurring of the image indicate the urgency and subjectivity of the shots, the bodily rhythm and proximity of the camerawork, the random desperation with which her body hurls itself through space. Moodysson creates a staccato effect through jump-cuts, with relentless repetition as the camera is closer, then more distant, then closer again. The camera cuts away to birds circling in the sky and cuts back to the textures of the wasted urban space – tarmac, concrete – in which Lilya is entrapped. Such cutting, and the blistering music of the soundtrack generate

32 *Lilya 4-ever* was inspired by the true story of a young girl in Malmö, sold into the sex trade like Lilya, who jumped from a bridge after having escaped from a locked apartment.

33 Slavoj Žižek, *The Fright of Real Tears: Krzysztof Kieślowski Between Theory and Post-theory* (London: British Film Institute, 2001), p. 94.

34 Moodysson also reflects and repeats scenes in *Show Me Love* here.

sensations of friction, of collision. Closeups of Lilya's face speak of the contrasting fragility of her flesh in this environment (bruises are visible across her cheekbone, mud stains on her jacket). In these moments before she jumps from the bridge, her gaze blurs as it does later when she sniffs glue; her environment and the imprint of it found by the film are finally numbing, narcotic, toxic.

Leaving action suspended, the film cuts to the titles. The opening is the basis of *Lilya 4-ever*,³² what remains of the film, its major part, may be Lilya's dreams and memories as she contemplates dying, adrenaline-generated images of her past life, or virtual embellishments, repeat imaginings of what might bring her to this point. Both possibilities assert the viewer's lack of control over the images viewed, the film's resistance to her mastery and interpretation.

In *The Fright of Real Tears*, Slavoj Žižek considers the repeating narrative strands in the films of Kieślowski, writing: 'Kieślowski's universe is one created by a perverse, confused and idiotic God who screwed up the work of Creation, producing an imperfect world, and then tried to save whatever could be saved by repeated new attempts'.³³ He summons an image of Ripley in *Alien Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997) encountering ontologically failed, defective versions of herself as she sees the seven aborted attempts to clone her on display, each repeated version of reality botched. This image of repeated failures is resonant for *Lilya 4-ever*, in which Moodysson too constructs a view of a warped, imperfect world, not saved by repeated new attempts at creation. This is seen most clearly in the return to the flyover scene at the end of the film.³⁴ By this stage the viewer is aware of the decreasing stability of Lilya's perception of the world around her, of the delusions which interrupt her vision of reality. Images return – the birds flying, the death run – but in this replay Lilya is accompanied by Volodya, another child who, living and dead, has shadowed her in the film. On the rerun of these images, Lilya now jumps and falls. The film cuts to Lilya in an ambulance, taking us beyond the point reached at its opening to Lilya's 'general circulatory arrest'. In the enclosed, womb-like space of the ambulance, Volodya is crouched with her (as he has been previously in the film in the makeshift cocoons-cum-coffins they create for themselves, spaces cut off from reality, in Lilya's apartment and in the derelict factory). Lilya's eyes open in what may be the moment of her death and the film indulges in some afterlife images, a further rerun. Here Lilya chooses not to leave Russia for Sweden; she stays with Volodya, repairing the betrayal which has repeated her own abandonment by her mother.

Indeed the most emotive scene of the film records the departure of Lilya's mother. It is the scene which draws attention most clearly to the ambiguities in the presentation of Lilya (apparent throughout the film) where she herself is shown in transition between childhood and adulthood. The farewell between mother and child effectively happens twice. In the first scene the mother says: 'Honey, I have to go now'. Lilya is seen in her nightdress, looking at a magazine and ignoring her mother.

In the detail of the shot we see an advertisement in the magazine she is reading, the texture of the rug hanging on the wall behind her. Lilya is seen here to be truculent, nonchalant; after letting herself be hugged she goes back to reading her magazine. Her mother says 'Fine', and leaves. The film is again suspended, in stasis. The shot allows the viewer to linger on small details, Lilya's bead bracelets, tiny adornments. Then hastily the fantasy of her autonomy and indifference disintegrates and Lilya morphs into a noisy, urgent, terrified child. She cries 'Wait Mom', 'Mom! Don't go!' and 'Don't leave me, please', as handheld camera shots track her accelerated flight downstairs, the stillness garnered previously now dissolved in speed and proximity, as if the camera is impelled by Lilya's emotion. Bare-legged, ungainly in her nightgown, Lilya is a child now violently hugging her mother, both their heads seen in the shot and Lilya screaming 'Don't go, stay with me, I won't make it!'. Her animal sounds of despair dominate the scene. The car drives off and Lilya runs after it. Unable to reach her mother, she falls in the mud and the film follows her complete regression: in the viscous substance of the mud, Lilya is infantilized, splattered, stained by the inextricable mess (of her emotions, of her visceral grief at her mother's departure); these shots of her despair are shown in slow motion, as the film fairly bathes in the pathos of its subject.

The shots are hard to watch and hear; as Lilya herself moves from adolescent to howling child, so the viewer, touched in particular by the proximity of the shots, the babble of the child, by these visceral tugs, may (in Nussbaum's terms) respond to this scene through the (mnemonic) pull of the emotions. In its content and also in the bodily, messy form of the shots, the scene brings us suddenly up close to an irreparable moment of loss. This regression for the viewer, so knowingly managed within the film, ties her in to identification with Lilya, with her urgent emotion. Lilya is the child the viewer has been, experiencing separation, knowing a lack of control over her environment, an inability to call and recall her mother; yet, still more uncertainly, Lilya may also be a child the viewer has left behind, a reminder of parental responsibility and its visceral ties. Herein too lies a horror of the film's repetitions; as Lilya runs at the start of the film, as she runs at the end, she is arguably each time (inexhaustibly) repeating this hopeless departure from her mother, and recalling the viewer's departures.

Martha ... Martha, with repetition in its very title, equally replays moments of separation, of emotive departure between parent and child. Where Lilya is poised between childhood and adulthood, and the actress Oksana Akinsjina moderates this oscillation in her extraordinary performance, in *Martha ... Martha* Veysset plays out the child-adult divide more graphically in her dual focus on Martha, the protagonist, and her daughter Lise – and on the resemblance and difference between the two. Central to the film is a tale of a missing child, Martha's brother, who has drowned. Martha's responsibility, or otherwise, for his death is left unclear through the film. Her brother's loss fissures her relations to her

parents, to her sister and to her own child Lise, with whom she identifies but whose safety she appears constantly to place under threat. As adult, Martha is imaged as intermittently childlike, particularly in a pattern of bodily imitations: Martha plays monopoly with Lise, for example, and they both sit mirroring one another with their hair tied up in childish bunches. Shots are seen of both, at various times, huddled in bed, beneath swaddling covers. When Martha has been raped and is seen walking home through the woods, in a sound-bridge to the next scene a doctor's voice is heard, but we find that he is examining Lise, not Martha. The viewer is led momentarily to confuse mother and daughter. Further, Martha's own relation to external images is frequently imitative and unsettling: watching a horror film, she imitates its dying creature to scare and entrance her daughter. Her ambiguous, psychological abuse of the child takes the form more broadly of games with death and playing dead; playing with pillows in bed in the morning, Martha repeatedly brings the pillow down over Lise's face. The film courts the possibility that Martha will play out and repeat her brother's death; in this sense, summoning fear and premonition for its viewers, engaging our construction of virtual scenarios, rather than literally repeating scenes, Veysset, like Moodysson, propagates a sense of a failed, repeating, imperfect world.

The fear of Martha as abusive also infects her partner Reymond, whose own relation to Lise is more protective. It is Reymond who will separate mother and child in a scene whose affect is comparable to the scene of separation viewed in *Lilya 4-ever*. When Martha returns home, having been raped, Lise peers at her over the back of a sofa; its bulk is a soft barrier between them (as the film elsewhere places a stone wall in the frame dividing Martha and her own mother). We watch Martha's return from Lise's point of view; she enters the bathroom where Martha has taken refuge saying that she needs to pee (it has been Martha's own need to pee, in the bushes, which has precipitated her rape in a previous scene). As in *Lilya 4-ever*, the film lets us see the small details of the setting, its material reality: the owl design on the orange and brown wallpaper, the sunflower on the washbag, the stripes of Lise's cotton top. We see Lise pee, unselfconscious, at home in her environment; but Martha's bodily presence, and pain, overwhelms them. The film offers a closeup of Lise's face as she cries 'Papa'; trying to quell the child's noise, or to drown it out, Martha brings her into the shower with her under the water. Lise is speechless at her mother's act; she is immersed in her mother's distress and emotion, undone and visibly disturbed, drenched. Vulnerable, pale, half-clothed, she resembles her mother as she was raped. The mise-en-scene corroborates the asphyxiating closeness between mother and child, as images of both mother and child, symbiotic, are repeated in the bathroom mirror. Pictorially, playing with colours of pale flesh, blood, red cloth, the scene resembles the colour scheme and bodily torsions of certain watercolours and paintings by Egon Schiele. As in *Lilya 4-ever*, cries dominate the soundtrack.

35 Florian Grandena draws attention to the ways in which Veysset's earlier feature film also interlaces realism with subjective perception and a dream-like, mythic reality, in 'The provinces in contemporary French cinema: the case of *Y aura-t-il de la neige à Noël?*', *Studies in French Cinema*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 113–20, p. 117.

Reymond interrupts this merger, wrenching Lise from her mother – from this wet, staining mess – bundling her up and depositing her with the neighbours. His imposition of order does not arrest the effect of the scene on the viewer. The scene, its affect, insist, rather, and now infest the film, manifesting its power in further circles of repetition, in particular in the one dream sequence of the film, a dream from Lise's perspective.³⁵ Martha disappears after the violent shower scene; the dream comes when she has been rediscovered and is recuperating in a psychiatric hospital. The scene opens with Lise at the neighbour's house, and the neighbour talking with Reymond while Lise apparently sleeps; Reymond carries his child home and in this moment of transition, through a closeup which resembles the image of Lise's screaming face in the shower scene, we enter her subjective reality, allowing the child's mental perceptions to offer a condensed image of the film's fears and emotions. A dark water-filled landscape and images of Lise in red are reminiscent of *Don't Look Now* (Nicolas Roeg, 1973) and *La Cité des enfants perdus* (Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1995); the child, previously drenched in the shower, is lost here in a drowning world. The sounds of the scene – mechanical, metallic, strident – seem closely-mixed, insistently loud as a mechanized rag-picker collects drowning plush creatures from the flood. Lise herself, part animate, part animal here, seems powerless, petrified in this dream space. Her image flickers away at the end of the sequence, mirroring speeded-up footage of Martha before the titles. As it leaves her mental pictures behind, the film offers a very still image of Lise in bed staring into the distance.

The film runs straight on to show Reymond and Lise collect Martha from hospital, in daytime scenes where Lise has more autonomy. Veysset plays with scale showing Lise both as sentient subject, vehicle of the film's obsessions and unconscious, and as a small child within her parents' space and drama: a high-angle shot, from Martha's perspective, shows a suddenly dwarfed Lise in the hospital environment. The distance between mother and daughter is crossed, however, as Lise hugs her mother, but Veysset offers no easy emotion here. The image of tactile comfort and relief is strained, as Martha (again helplessly death-bearing) clasps Lise too hard and the child resists. Later Martha sleeps, recalling images of the swaddled, childlike Lise; Lise, by contrast, says to her father, 'I don't think it's her', rejecting the smelly, doped, clinging mother asleep in front of her.

At the end of the film, the family, displaced once more, sets up home in a new house, but one that is close to a flowing river, the sound of the river's rushing water dominating the last scenes. Martha, like Lilya, hopelessly entrapped in a carceral world of repetitions, walks into the water of the river and disappears from the frame. The film cuts to a daylight shot, ending with the sound of the water and of birdsong, birds having been heard at the opening. Again the viewer is cradled, or entrapped, by the repetition and return of a film, by its enclosure and encircling emotions.

36 Wilson, *Cinema's Missing Children*, p. 15.

Helplessness is key to these films as the viewer faces the inexorability of her return to (separation) scenes which offer no new exit. There is a degree of helplessness, too, in the way we are buffeted and moved by the camerawork, in the kinesthetic effects of the films, in their enveloping of the viewer in worlds of material detail and emotive contact, in our bodily proximity to the (child) protagonists. Through this movement and proximity, in their refusal to fix their represented children as images of childhood innocence, in their moves to show the subjective perceptions of these child subjects, Moodysson and Veyssset deny the shoring up of divisions between adult and child, and open us up to the child's emotions. In this way they explore cinematic means of prompting us to remember the intensity and intermittence, the variety and variation of adolescent and infant feeling; such filmmaking can, as Moodysson insists, make an intervention, challenging the politics of representation, in its close attention to child emotion. This has its place, in particular at a historical moment when the family and kinship relations are in flux. Yet, as my focus on separation scenes implies, a recognition of the complexity of individuation as process, the vulnerability of children caught in a nexus of adult needs and desires, may be of broader significance. In *Cinema's Missing Children*, I argue that 'in contemporary film, increasingly, the lost object of desire, origin and vanishing point is the missing child'.³⁶ Like the footage of Sabine Dardenne, these recent films have caught me unawares, reminding me at every turn of the (suffering) child as visceral, sentient, moving, present.

Unfamiliar places: 'heterospection' and recent French films on children

PHIL POWRIE

In 2002, two French films about children were released within two weeks of each other. Although *Être et avoir* (Nicolas Philibert, released 28 August) was a documentary focusing on a village school and *Les Diables* (Christophe Ruggia, released 11 September) was a drama about two institutionalized children on the run, they had in common the fact that they focused on preadolescent children. While there are plenty of films about adolescents in most national cinemas, there are proportionately fewer that focus on preadolescent children (Spanish cinema being a notable exception). These films therefore exemplify a trend: since the 1990s, there has been an unusually large number of films in French cinema whose protagonists are young children. My essay will start by placing such films within a production context. Subsequently, it will be less concerned with explaining why there may have been a surge in such films during the last decade than in theorizing their effect on spectators, with specific reference to *Être et avoir* and *Les Diables*. It will do so by working with concepts of space, as used by Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, familiar to theorists of the postmodern working in architecture, but not as yet particularly developed by theorists working in film studies. Using Foucault's spatially-focused 'heterotopia', the essay will develop a nexus of arguments focusing on the viewing position established by films with child protagonists. I shall argue that the preadolescent child's view brings together time past and an alternative space, first considering retrospection, linked with the familiar idea of nostalgia, before moving on to what will be called 'heterospection', a coinage which attempts to bring together issues of time and space in these films. Heterospection, I shall argue, involves a different way of seeing, and of conceiving the

spectator's reaction to a film. In that respect, the essay returns to 'screen theory', but from a different perspective, as well as illuminating how the child film functions.

Context

The group of French films focusing on preadolescent protagonists since 1990 show changes of focus relative to similar films which preceded them. There is a new focus on abuse, at its clearest in the controversial *L'Ombre du doute* (Aline Issermann, 1993), which deals with an eleven-year-old girl's abuse by her father, but also found in *La Classe de neige* (Claude Miller, 1998), in which the overprotective father of a boy who goes on a school trip turns out to be a child abuser and murderer. There is a related emphasis on death in *Ponette* (Jacques Doillon, 1996), which is about a four-year-old's attempts to come to terms with the death of her mother. There are also a number of films which improbably show their protagonists as drifters, homeless children seeking the parental affection which they have never been given, either because their parents abused them, as with *Victor ... pendant qu'il est trop tard* (Sandrine Veysset, 1998), about a young boy who runs away and forms a friendship with fairground workers, or because they have no parents and are trying to escape from institutions. The latter is the case for *Le Fils du requin* (Agnès Merlet, 1993), a film which refers directly to Truffaut's *Les 400 coups* as it follows two socially-marginalized young brothers. It is also the case with *Les Diables*, a film in which two disturbed children, a brother and his mentally-retarded sister, repeatedly break out of the institutions in which they are kept in an attempt to find the mother who gave them up. Despite this search, the film is less about the importance of the mother than the need for place, counter to the displacement which forms the narrative as they travel south in search of the family home. A recurrent scene is the sister's speeded-up assemblage of broken pieces of coloured glass in the form of their fantasized home.

Les 400 coups is also gestured at in *Être et avoir*, a film which, unlike *Les Diables*, was one of the most successful films of 2002, with 1.8 million spectators, and 200,000 DVDs sold subsequently. *Être et avoir* is part of a small subset of such films set in educational institutions. It is a sensitive study of a year in the life of a small rural primary school in the Auvergne, with emphasis on the seasons which structure the school year. In this respect it is the more utopian version of the considerably darker and more Loachian social-realist *Ça commence aujourd'hui* (Bertrand Tavernier, 1999), in which a socially-conscious primary-school headteacher in a northern French town, where unemployment is rife, gets involved in the lives of his pupils. In *Être et avoir* we also focus on a male schoolteacher, who has a single class of pupils of all ages, and who comes across as a warm and sensitive mother-figure, cuddling the children when they are hurt, for example, similar to the protagonist of the big success of 2004, *Les Choristes* (Christophe Barratier).

- 1 Philibert's major documentaries have combined an interest in institutions, and in how people communicate: the deaf in *Le Pays des sourds* (1992); the Natural History Museum in *Un animal, des animaux* (1994); a psychiatric hospital where the inmates are working to put on a play in *La Moindre des choses* (1997); drama students trying to create a play around a theme in *Qui sait?* (1998); the Louvre in *La Ville Louvre* (1999). Ruggia's films focus on child protagonists: the short *L'Enfance égarée* (1993) and the adaptation of the well-known novel, *Le Gone du chaâba* (1998), about the son of an Algerian immigrant in 1960s France.
- 2 Elizabeth Roudinesco, *La Famille en désordre* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 2002), whose title translates as 'the family in chaos'.
- 3 779,000 in 2000, or 189 births for 100 women (in other words, 1.89 children per woman), compared to 164 in the UK and 134 in Germany. See Lionel Doisneau, 'Panorama démographique de la France en 2000', *Données sociales: la société française* (Paris: INSEE, 2002), p. 12.
- 4 Four out of ten, or 39%, in 1999 as opposed to 33% in 1991 and 24% in 1981. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- 5 Whereas 10% of women between the ages of forty and forty-five were single mothers in 1990, in 1999 the age-range for this percentage has dramatically increased to between thirty-five and fifty. See Géraldine Labarthe, 'Les Structures familiales', *Données sociales: la société française* (Paris: INSEE, 2002), p. 36.
- 6 Richard Coe, *When the Grass was Taller* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), p. 40.

While *Être et avoir* and *Les Diables* are logical developments in the work of both directors,¹ they also suggest a broader interest in the intersection between state institutions and the role of the family, with children as potential victims of the failure of both, as can be seen in popularizing books such as the psychoanalyst Elizabeth Roudinesco's recent work, published in the same year as the two films.² It is not difficult to see why the French might be preoccupied by children in a sociodemographic and political perspective: on the one hand, France is the European country with the greatest increase in and number of births in recent years,³ but on the other, divorce rates have increased,⁴ as has the number of single mothers.⁵ While these social shifts undoubtedly have their part to play in explaining why there has been a sudden increase in films focusing on children since 1990, I am not concerned here with pinpointing the causes so much as the effects. The films mentioned above, with the exception of *Être et avoir*, are clearly not intended for 'family viewing'; their intended audience is adults. This raises the question of how the use of child protagonists may create different meanings than the use of adolescent or adult protagonists.

Retrospection

Film representations of children look nostalgically backwards at childhood as a moment of purity and freedom from the materialistic constraints of the adult world, either explicitly in the case of a utopian film such as *Être et avoir*, or implicitly and liminally in more dystopian films such as *Les Diables*, in which the boy dies. This corresponds to the standard Romantic view of the child as one of almost pre-lapsarian innocence. Richard Coe, in his study of autobiography, writes that the Romantics 'were unable to make the distinction between the reality of their child selves and the sentimentalized-idealized image of childhood innocence'.⁶ Freud's polymorphously perverse child notwithstanding, it is a fantasy which has endured. This liminal nostalgia is present even in films where child-killers are the focus, as is the case with another film from 2002, the Brazilian *Cidade de Deus/City of God* (Fernando Meirelles/Kátia Lund, Brazil/France/USA). The subtext in the first type is 'I wish I could find that state of innocence again' (nostalgia tinged with self-pity); the subtext in the latter is 'thank God my childhood was not like that' (nostalgia tinged with pity).

The mention of child-killers is far from irrelevant, as it helps to unravel what 'innocence' might mean in these circumstances. The word is etymologically linked to the idea of death. Connected to the Indo-European root *nek-* (to bring about death), it gives us the Ancient Greek *nekros* (meaning dead), the Latin *nex* (violent death), and various derivations, including *nocere* (to harm) and *nocens* (guilty), leading to the antonym *innocens* (innocent) – the one who is not guilty of harming. The child-killer is a contradiction, which accounts for the shock we may well experience when such characters are encountered: in the Romantic

A countryside imbued with nostalgia. *Les Diables* (Christophe Ruggia, 2002). Courtesy of Océan Films.



view of childhood, children are supposed to be incapable of inflicting harm. The utopian child's point of view is therefore one in which violence does not exist, or is transformed into something else, a fantasy of immortality, as is exemplified in *Ponette*, where the four-year-old girl fantasizes the return of her dead mother as she waits in the cemetery.

That cemetery is located very firmly in the countryside. In both *Les Diables* and *Être et avoir*, too, non-urban space and place are key, corresponding again to the Romantic association of the child with the natural world. In *Être et avoir* there are frequent shots of the countryside going through the cycle of the seasons. These shots give the film a structure, embedding the cameos of schoolroom events, but also embedding the nurturing provided by the school teacher in a nostalgic framework. In *Les Diables*, the children are at their most free when in the countryside, away from institutions and ordered urban spaces. We see the children hiding in woods where Chloé reconstructs her fantasized home with coloured shards of glass. But whereas we might, more stereotypically, expect such a representation to be drawn with coloured pencils on white paper, Chloé's mosaic emerges elementally and 'magically' (these are the only fast-motion shots in the film) from the soil in the woods. The soil can be discerned through the coloured glass, underlining the link between 'natural' space, the fantasized home, and the feminine.

This is in keeping with Henri Lefebvre's point that 'nature' is commonly perceived as origin: 'Natural space was – and it remains – the common point of departure: the origin, and the original model, of the social process – perhaps even the basis of all "originality"'.⁷ He comments that social and political fragmentation leads to ideological appeals to the organic as mythified origin: 'The idea of an organic space ... is ... an appeal to a unity, and beyond that unity (or short of it) to an *origin* deemed to be known with absolute certainty, identified beyond any possible doubt – an origin that legitimates and justifies'.⁸ Against this mythified origin, he contrasts what he calls genital space, associated with property and the family, which is the arena in which capitalist societies retain some sense of order as social bonds are undermined.⁹

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 30; first published in French in 1974.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 274–5 (emphasis in original).

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 232–3.

Both films under consideration exemplify these ideologically-determined representations. Both incorporate appeals to the countryside, and in both cases the status of the family is in question. In *Être et avoir* we rarely see the families of the children, as if the school, which has children of all ages in a single class, provides a surrogate family closer to what Roudinesco calls the 'tribe' than the bourgeois family of modern times. In *Les Diables*, similarly, institutional carers act as surrogate family and the mother is presented to us as a psychologically fragile person, who abandons the children a second time, after revealing to her son that the child he considers as his sister is not related to him by blood at all, thus destroying his personal myth of himself as carer and nurturer. By contrast with what we might consider to signal the failing family, shots of the countryside are imbued with nostalgia. In *Les Diables*, the children not only travel through woods, potentially dangerous spaces familiar in fairytales, but also across the rather more idyllic lavender fields. These are associated with Provence in the French imaginary, which is itself associated with certain types of heritage film, such as Pagnol adaptations, whether those of the 1980s (*Jean de Florette/Manon des Sources*, Claude Berri, 1986), or the films directed by Pagnol in the 1930s and 1940s, to which these two films gesture.¹⁰

As I have explained in the context of British 'alternative heritage' films, the location of these films in provincial locations is an important component of spectatorial identification, which can be called *metastasis*, given the importance of displacement and the way in which displacement generates nostalgia:

The regional factor localises pastness geographically, making the general more specific. Spectators need that specificity because it gives a strong sense of place, and the evocation of the past requires that we be displaced from the present by the pull of a past place, the unrecoverable home. Spectatorial response can therefore be defined as a kind of *metastasis*: we are displaced from the present into a very abstract place, a utopia – literally, a no-place – but we are attracted there by a very specific place, a place whose regional specificity is precisely what makes it attractive. The spectators of a film that generates nostalgia are thus invited to relocate the past place, and relocate themselves within it: 'I wish to be that boy in that place, because I was once (like) that boy in that place. I once also inhabited a very specific place.' We are thus invited to desire sameness while maintaining difference ('I could have been that boy in Liverpool, although in fact I was that/this boy in London').¹¹

This oddly fractured spectatorial position is characteristic of the child film, and I shall develop it by considering another aspect.

There is a crucial difference between the two films under consideration. *Être et avoir*, with its seasonal structure and gently maternal male schoolteacher, is a utopia predicated on circularity and stability. *Les Diables*, on the other hand, is a dystopian road movie,

¹⁰ See Phil Powrie, 'Jean de Florette and Manon des Sources (1986): nostalgia and hysteria', in *French Cinema in the 1980s: Nostalgia and the Crisis of Masculinity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 50–61.

¹¹ Phil Powrie, 'On the threshold between past and present: "alternative heritage"', in Andrew Higson and Justine Ashby (eds), *British Cinema: Past and Present* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 323–4.

where certainties are gradually demolished in linear fashion, signalling the destruction of fantasized organicity and the maternally-structured feminine, and the advent of Lefebvre's genital economy of space. It is precisely this difference which allows us to pinpoint a second major issue relating to innocence, after that of nostalgia: desexualization.

The presence of a prepubescent child desexualizes relationships, in the sense that relationships are not represented as part of a genital economy. Part of the pleasure in *Être et avoir* is to see the male schoolteacher being as much a mother as a father to his charges, as is emphasized when the teacher holds up a piece of paper on which one of his pupils has written the word 'mother'. When this is linked to the rhythm of the seasons and shots of the countryside, with few shots of families, it is easy to see how a different, although sentimental and nostalgic, space is constructed, fantasized as pre-oedipal. The narrative structure of *Les Diables* is somewhat different. There is certainly retrospection, in the sense that the children are trying to return to the home they have never had; but by the same token, they must leave to do so and project themselves into the world, looking forward in prospection. The film is a road movie, and



Joseph (Vincent Rottiers) and
Chloé (Adele Haenel) in *Les
Diables* (Christophe Ruggia, 2002).
Courtesy of Océan Films.

The maternal role of the schoolteacher (Georges Lopez) is emphasized in *Être et Avoir* (Nicolas Philibert, 2002). Courtesy of Les Films du Losange.



adopts the kind of linearity, quite unlike the circularity of *Être et avoir*, which such prospection into the future requires.

Projecting their desires into the future leads to sexualization for the children; the desire for home, as the fantasy is destroyed, gradually gives way to oedipal and sexual desire, as well as death. The brother, who has been told by his mother that his 'sister' is not his sister at all, becomes sexually excited as they play in an underground pool, which functions as a version of the swimming-pool they have imagined as part of the fantasized home in the south of the country. Sex brings closure to the journey. The boy has a night of passion with his pseudo-sister, but is then, significantly, shot by a policeman he attacks when roaming the streets. The film thus stresses the reimposition of the Law, in its widest sense, including death as the law of desire. The brother-who-is-not-a-brother (and therefore no-one he can recognize, since the film has insisted on his self-identity as a carer) slowly dies from his gunshot wound in the garden of the bourgeois couple the children have terrorized. The ending of *Les Diables* shows us then how desexualization and the evacuation of sexual desire are important for the child film. *Les Diables* shows, when contrasted with *Être et avoir*, how loss of desire for the other halts forward motion, halts projection and prospection. Lack of desire, lack of forward motion, and lack of the narratively-articulated fantasy of home, as in *Les Diables*, are the prerequisites for the circularity and stability we find as narrative structure in *Être et avoir*.

There is a further difference between the two films in this respect, demonstrating the in-between zone into which such films place us. It is the role of language. In *Être et avoir*, the children are constantly learning language, learning with difficulty how to articulate their position in the world. A similar situation occurs in *Les Choristes*, in which Clément Mathieu teaches the unruly boys to express themselves through song. In *Les Diables*, by contrast, although Joseph, the brother, also has difficulty expressing his desires without being aggressive, he is very articulate, and never seems to stop talking, as befits the protagonist of an oedipalized narrative whose entry into language and into desire is coterminous; his logorrhoea is an excess of language, paralleling the excessive nature of his desires for the fantasized home and for his 'sister'.

Children in the films I am concerned with are located between the advent of language (so after the infant stage; *infans* meaning deprived of

language) and the onset of sexuality and death (desire and the death drive). The defining feature of representations of preadolescent children is that they are poised on a threshold, an in-between space – neither no-mans land, nor no-child's land – where fantasy and reality are jumbled. Adult spectators, to the extent that they may be identifying themselves with the child protagonists, are looking both backwards nostalgically in retrospection to a period of innocence, and forwards in prospection to the entry into the 'guilt' constituted by desire and its violence. The child provides a threshold, or cusp, where desire can be configured as virtual, as a developmental horizon, in sight but out of reach, allowing the fantasy of pre-oedipal innocence to infect spectatorial affect. It is appropriate to remind ourselves that nostalgia is formed from the Greek words meaning home and suffering, in that order. In this optic, nostalgia is less a superficial phenomenon of postmodernity, associated with the visible, and history-free depthlessness, as Jameson might have it,¹² than a deeply embodied affect, where meaning is invaded by emotion, accounting no doubt for the profound effect it can have on spectators.

In this section I have shown how innocence and nostalgia are linked in films with preadolescent protagonists. Such films construct a fantasized pastness for spectators, an *illud tempus* or mythical time (the term frequently used by the historian of religions Mircea Eliade), prior to the atomization of the social into 'genitalized' family units by capitalism, as Lefebvre would have it.¹³ They do so more easily precisely because the child protagonist invites the reading of space and time as pre-oedipal, as being *on the threshold*. This places the spectator in the position of looking back ('I was once that child'), while at the same time looking forward ('that child will be what I am now'). In the next section I shall consider how the threshold is not so much a binary structured on the retrospective and the prospective, or on the pre-oedipal/oedipal, as has been suggested so far, than a different type of space – a heterotopic space of difference – which the spectator is invited to inhabit.

Heterospection

What is heterotopia? Lefebvre occasionally uses this term purely functionally as part of a typology of spatial distinction (isotopias, utopias, heterotopias), where he defines heterotopias as 'contrasting spaces' or 'mutually repellent spaces'.¹⁴ Foucault had previously developed the idea in a 1967 lecture.¹⁵ Heterotopic spaces for him are 'counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted'. There are clearly problems with such contestatory spaces, not least the perennial problem of any radical discourse, whereby the naming of such a space immediately reduces its radical potential.¹⁶ Notwithstanding such issues, we can, by analogy, suggest that the young child film constructs a heterotopic view. Amongst Foucault's examples are spaces where

12 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

13 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 382.

14 Ibid., pp. 294, 366.

15 Michel Foucault, 'Des espaces autres', *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, no. 5 (October 1984), pp. 46–9. It has been translated as 'Of other spaces', *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1 (1986), pp. 22–7, and can be found on numerous internet sites in this version. I have used the text reproduced on a large website devoted to Foucault, at <http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html> [accessed 7 May 2005].

16 See Edward W. Soja, 'Heterologies: a remembrance of other spaces in the citadel-LA', in Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (eds), *Postmodern Cities and Spaces* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 13–34; Benjamin Genocchio, 'Discourse, discontinuity, difference', in *ibid.*, pp. 35–46.

deviants are placed, such as psychiatric hospitals and prisons (the case with the children of *Les Diables*, as well as many other child films); spaces of juxtaposed spaces (cinemas, gardens); sacred spaces (cemeteries; *Ponette* configures a heterotopic child's view within a rural cemetery); spaces of accumulated time (museums, libraries); spaces of transitory time (festivals, fairgrounds, holiday cottages); spaces of illusion which critique quotidian space (brothels); spaces of attempted perfection (the colonies).

The spaces of which Foucault talks are real physical spaces, whereas the threshold space discussed here in relation to the child film is a more abstract space. Nonetheless, Foucault's notion is useful, for three reasons. First, heterotopic spaces combine incompatible spaces: 'The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible'. Foucault explains, for example, how one such space, the cinema, 'is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space'.

A second reason is that watching a film is potentially to inhabit a heterotopic space in more than just the physical sense suggested by Foucault in the previous paragraph. He discusses the way in which the mirror is both a utopia but also a heterotopia, in terms which recall the Lacanian formulation of viewing familiar in film studies. It is instructive to replace the word mirror by the word screen in the following passage:

The mirror is, after all, a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror [screen], I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent: such is the utopia of the mirror [screen]. But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror [screen] does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counteraction on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror [screen] I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there. Starting from this gaze that is, as it were, directed toward me, from the ground of this virtual space that is on the other side of the glass [screen], I come back toward myself; I begin again to direct my eyes toward myself and to reconstitute myself there where I am. The mirror [screen] functions as a heterotopia in this respect: it makes this place that I occupy at the moment when I look at myself in the glass [screen] at once absolutely real, connected with all the space that surrounds it, and absolutely unreal, since in order to be perceived it has to pass through this virtual point which is over there.

Identifying with a child protagonist is likely, I might argue, to increase this feeling of being 'over there' in a different space-time, identifying ourselves with the 'ideal ego' of psychoanalysis.

The third reason is that the word heterotopia is linked to a medical condition, although this is not something discussed by Foucault. The

17 The concept of utopia originated in 1551 with the publication of Sir Thomas Moore's book. The word dystopia, interestingly, is contemporaneous with heterotopia, being first attested in 1868 according to the Oxford English Dictionary.

18 See Jean Starobinski, 'The idea of nostalgia', *Diogenes*, no. 54 (1966), pp. 81–103.

19 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 384 (emphasis in original).

word heterotopia is attested in 1870. It is therefore clearly a phenomenon of modernity, broadly contemporaneous with the advent of film.¹⁷ In medicine it is used to refer to a displacement, when a tumour occurs in the body which is composed of parts not normally found in that location. We can relate this sense of displacement to the loss and anxiety that form nostalgia, itself originally conceived in the mid eighteenth century as a medical condition.¹⁸

Bringing these three points together, we can hypothesize that heterotopic space, where viewing a film is concerned, is the abstract spectatorial space (conditioned by the physical experience of being in a physically-determined heterotopic space, that of the cinema), which constitutes a combination of dislocation in time and space, experienced as loss and anxiety. This space is more likely to be experienced in films where spectators are asked to adopt the point of view of the child, because this displaces them from the present space-time of the viewing experience to the past. The difference between seeing the past articulated around a child rather than a former adult self is the *child's body*. Lefebvre writes about the radical potential of the body in relation to ordered genital space, saying that the body behaves 'as a *differential field* . . . as a *total body*, breaking out of the temporal and spatial shell'.¹⁹ The child's body actualizes that differential more immediately, by calling attention to past time, and the development of experience. The space is heterotopic in the medical sense of a space formed from spatial and/or temporal elements not normally found in the spectator's present; nor indeed is this space specific to individual spectators, except in the most generic sense that they might map their experiences onto those of the child protagonist.

Returning to the relationship between utopia and heterotopia, utopia is the space of imagined organic unity (similar to the 'ideal ego' of psychoanalysis). It precedes dystopia, which is the perception that we inhabit spaces that have lost the connection to the organic. Broadly, this is the difference between the vanished or vanishing social and communitarian on the one hand, and the fragmented genital spaces of the family on the other. It would be tempting to see heterotopia conceptually as a development along this linear axis: utopia-past, dystopia-present, heterotopia-future. But heterotopias coexist with the other two spaces; they constitute alternatives which combine the utopian and the dystopian, but which cannot be reduced to them. This is why we could describe *Être et avoir* as a utopian film, and *Les Diables* as a dystopian film, while positing that both engage us in a heterotopic space. Heterotopic space is a different space. Its relationship to oedipal structures is one of differential; it is both within the male–female binary, and displaced within it, as a space which contests that binary. The difference suggested here is not just one of differential; there are two further issues related to it: defamiliarization and deviation.

The child's view defamiliarizes the world. We have seen, using Foucault, how the heterotopic space is both 'here' and 'there', combining the recognizable, and the recognizable displaced into a heterotopic

elsewhere so that it becomes unrecognizable. The world, in other words, in the child film, becomes *unfamiliar in its familiarity*. This is Freud's definition of the uncanny, with its complex shuttling between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, the homely and the unhomely, shading off into each other perplexingly. And what is *familiarity* if it is not the construction of the family? In other words, the child's view both questions the family and reconstructs it differently for the spectator. That reconstruction is itself a question, a double-edged question: is the family a place of protection, or is it a place of death? *Les Diables* brings this issue into focus, with the recurrent use of Chloé's glass home: the shards have the colour and shape of an innocent child's construction of a safe space, but the pieces are made of glass, which can be partially seen through, in both the concrete and figurative sense, and are dangerous because they are sharp.

Finally, heterotopic spaces are spaces of deviation, Foucault suggests, citing as examples psychiatric hospitals, prisons and retirement homes – the reason for the last being that 'old age is a crisis, but is also a deviation since in our society where leisure is the rule, idleness is a sort of deviation'. He connects adolescents to 'heterotopias of crisis', but curiously does not mention the spaces inhabited by children. We could extrapolate from what he says of old age to characterize the social position occupied by children as one of idleness (rather than leisure), and to propose that their spaces, whether real or abstract, are *deviant heterotopias*. They are, to use a term employed by Máire Messenger Davies in this issue of *Screen*, 'crazy spaces'. In such spaces, a Bakhtinian contestation of order flourishes. However, crucially, this occurs without the adults who are in charge of that order being aware of it. In that respect, the world is not made topsy-turvy in a recognized moment of renewal through excess, but a moment of radical otherness, an unrecognized tumour within the visible body, but which creates pain (of nostalgia, of loss, of dispersal) nonetheless. It is less a case of the child's viewpoint being privileged, either consciously or unconsciously, over the adult viewpoint, than an issue of a different space, which, like the medical definition of the word heterotopia, uses elements taken from elsewhere to construct a defamiliarized space-time.

The word 'family' is based on a pre-Roman word, *famel*, meaning 'servant'. When it came to be used in Latin, *familia* originally referred to the household as constituted by a group of servants attached to a dwelling. Whatever else it may have meant subsequently in terms of blood-relatives gathered together as a group subordinated to patriarchal laws, originally the family was a *bond to a specific place* (the home, as demonstrated so well in *Les Diables*), as well as a more general bond to a space ('being a family together'). It therefore functioned, we might wish to argue, as both a place of servitude, and servitude itself. Both *Être et avoir* and *Les Diables* demonstrate the attachment to that bond, as well as, paradoxically, the desire to escape from it, even if they do so very differently. *Être et avoir* appeals to a surrogate family structure (the

school) and the rhythm of the seasons to construct a nostalgic framework. *Les Diables*, by contrast, shows its protagonists escaping from similar institutional structures (the home for disturbed children), so as to rediscover the maternal home for which they nostalgically yearn.

What makes these films so interesting is that the child's view allows spectators to inhabit both space-times. As spectators, we are, like the children themselves, on a threshold, looking back to our past and looking forwards to the present of our viewing from the place to which we are looking back. In that sense we are temporally (and temporarily) 'differentialized'. We are also desexualized, relating to oedipal structures tangentially, asymptotically. We are defamiliarized, in the sense that the familiar (what we know, our social and conceptual structures) is made unfamiliar.

That spectatorial position can be defined as heterospection, in that it is not simply retrospectively (and potentially regressively) nostalgic; but nor is it entirely prospectively (and potentially progressively) 'futured'. Heterospection is a moment which, to quote Foucault again, 'simultaneously represents, contests, and inverts'. It looks backwards and forwards, but also sideways, outwards, escaping centrifugally into multiplicities, while at the same time coalescing in a specific moment, a specific place. It is a view which paradoxically captures a moment made of shifting refractions, where time and space collapse, rather like the coloured glass 'home' of *Les Diables*, emerging like a fast-motion kaleidoscope, only to be destroyed again.

Put more simply, heterospection is being-adult while also being-child, inhabiting two different but complementary space-times. The effect is to allow us *simultaneously* to experience innocence, not just to view it, and to escape from the inevitable pain of innocence experienced, but also lost.

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The *bambino negato* or missing child of contemporary Italian cinema

PAUL SUTTON

To consider the child in contemporary Italian cinema is to consider also the contemporary Italian family, for it is within the context of, or in relation to, this most important of Italian institutions that the child is generally located. Thus while the 'traditional Italian family, child-oriented, patriarchal and Catholic'¹ has been subject to substantial transformation during the last thirty years or so, the social and discursive significance of the family still places it right at the very heart of the Italian way of life.²

Historically, Italian cinema has, since the silent era, played an important role in disseminating representations of this almost mythical *famiglia*, seen often as either 'a source of order and stability, and a force for national unity [or] a tenuous haven from the depredations of the social order; a signifier for social fragmentation . . . a myth in need of demystification'.³ As will be evident throughout this essay, the family remains a significant concern for contemporary Italy and for contemporary Italian cinema.

While the apparent cohesiveness and stability of the Italian family appears relatively unchanged, it is in fact 'becoming "long" and "thin": long in the sense of adult children staying longer at home; thin because of declining fertility rates',⁴ a shift that has unsurprisingly impacted directly on the child in the contemporary Italian family. Italy now has one of the lowest birth rates in the world; indeed the dominant family model in contemporary Italy is the 'family with only one child, one who was often born when the parents were over thirty'.⁵ The birth of fewer children has led, as one might expect, to a greater investment in them, producing what Paul Ginsborg has characterized as 'hyper-attention and hyper-affection'.⁶

1 Paul Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents: 1980–2001* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 69.

2 See 'Survey of Italy', *The Economist*, vol. CCCXV, no. 7656 (1990), p. 14.

3 Marcia Landy, *Italian Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 207.

4 Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 74.

5 Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, *The Cinema of Nanni Moretti: Dreams and Diaries* (London: Wallflower, 2004), p. 48.

6 Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 80.

- 7 Cited in *ibid.*
- 8 In *Io non ho paura* this mutual glance is visible between the film's central protagonists, the ten-year-old boys Michele and Filippo, who eventually 'become reflective images of each other'. Philip Kemp, 'I'm Not Scared', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 14, no. 3 (2004), pp. 46–7.
- 9 Ginsborg, *Italy and its Discontents*, p. 71.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 71. The increasing statistical invisibility of the actual child in Italian culture has led perhaps to the emergence of the cinematic child as a kind of excessively visible symptom, an anxiety-induced attempt to maintain the child's presence in the face of its threatened disappearance. The 'missing child' in the context of this article also refers perhaps to the actual missing child at the heart of *Io non ho paura* and to the 'missing child' of the spectator's own childhood. The phenomenon of the single-child family was explored memorably by Nanni Moretti in chapter two of *Caro Diario/Dear Diary* (1994).
- 11 Landy, *Italian Film*, p. xix.
- 12 In the context of a specifically Italian cinema it has been argued that historically the child and adolescent have 'functioned variously as signifiers of innocence in a corrupt world, melodramatic images of martyrdom tied to the disintegration or regeneration of society, figures of nostalgia for a lost past, signs of generational warfare in society, and as a means of providing a different and distanced perspective on familiar social situations'. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
- 13 Joe Kelleher, 'Face to face with terror: children in film', in Karin Lesnik-Oberstein (ed.), *Children in Culture: Approaches to Childhood* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 41.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 15 Landy, *Italian Film*, p. 252.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. xix.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 252.
- 18 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (London: Athlone, 1989), pp. 2–3.
- 19 Landy, *Italian Film*, p. 260.

This over-investment in the only child has also given rise to what the sociologists Vincenzo Padiglione and Corrado Pontalti have described as 'a constant "preoccupied glance", not only from parent to child, but from child to parent',⁷ leading ultimately to a circuit of mutual protection that is infantilizing in effects.⁸ The prevalence of the one-child family has given rise also to the descriptive category of '*il bambino negato*',⁹ the 'missing' or 'denied' child, a term that refers not only to the decline in the birth rate but which also takes note of the apparent statistical preference amongst Italians of all classes and ages for families with two children, despite in actuality producing only one.¹⁰

Given the phenomenon of the 'missing child' within the Italian family and society, it seems appropriate to consider whether children and adolescents might nonetheless return as a visible presence in contemporary mainstream Italian cinema and to explore the function and meaning attributable to this presence. As Marcia Landy has asserted, 'the figure of the child looms large in Italian cinema',¹¹ and it is certainly true that the representation of children and adolescents has been an important staple of Italian cinema since the silent era, with the neorealist films of the 1940s and those of Vittorio De Sica, perhaps, remaining the most well known.¹² It is difficult when one considers representations of the child in popular Italian cinema not to be drawn, almost inevitably, to images of Enzo Staiola as Bruno in De Sica's canonical film *Ladri di biciclette/The Bicycle Thieves* (1948); a film that casts a long shadow over a number of more contemporary Italian films concerned with representing the child cinematically. The film was notable, as were a number of other neorealist films, for its use of non-professional actors, and it has been suggested that the affective impact of the child in film more generally may result from 'the presence of the child – as, perhaps, a peculiar case of *actuality*';¹³ indeed it might be argued that what makes *Ladri di biciclette* so compelling is that 'in the cinema the child returns as precisely that: a *child*'.¹⁴ The international success of De Sica's film and its position in the canon have meant that the cinematic portrait it offers of childhood is one that has been reproduced across subsequent films, both in Italy and beyond. Landy in her account of the film argues convincingly that 'as a conduit to challenge prevailing assumptions about cinematic illusion',¹⁵ the child 'functions as an index to new forms of spectatorship',¹⁶ and that significantly 'the perceptual burden of the film rests with Bruno'.¹⁷ As Gilles Deleuze has argued, the child as witness is central to the neorealist film, a 'cinema of the seer and no longer the agent', in which 'the character has become a kind of viewer'.¹⁸ More contemporary Italian films, such as Giuseppe Tornatore's *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (1988), and one might add to this both his *L'uomo delle stelle/The Star Maker* (1994) and *Malèna* (2000), also make use of children 'as a strategy to expose the conventional and clichéd character of the adult world and provide a different perspective on contemporary life'.¹⁹ Of course, as Landy cautions, such films 'are also prey to their own clichés in their portraits of the precocity of youth and in attributing to children

20 Ibid.

21 Antonio Vitti, *Giuseppe de Santis and Postwar Italian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 93.

22 Ibid.

23 Landy, *Italian Film*, p. 257.

24 It is certainly true that a number of these films are intensely problematic in terms of the image of contemporary Italy or contemporary Italian cinema that they depict; thus Tornatore's film may be seen to reinforce the kinds of stereotypical representations of Italy that Moretti continually seeks to challenge in his films. For a convincing challenge to this view, see Rosalind Galt, 'Italy's landscapes of loss: historical mourning and the dialectical image in *Cinema Paradiso*, *Mediterraneo* and *Il Postino*', *Screen*, vol. 43, no. 2 (2002), pp. 158–73. For an analysis of Moretti's *Aprile* which explores the related issue of the representation of fatherhood in contemporary Italy and contemporary Italian film, see Paul Sutton, '"Can the man panic?": masculinity and fatherhood in Nanni Moretti's *Aprile* (1998)', in Phil Powrie, Ann Davies and Bruce Babington (eds), *The Trouble with Men: Masculinities in European and Hollywood Cinema* (London: Wallflower, 2004), pp. 144–54.

25 The *anni di piombo* culminated in the kidnap and murder in 1978 of the ex-prime minister Aldo Moro. In that year kidnappings had reached an all-time high, forcing the Italian government to adopt a policy of freezing the assets of the families of kidnap victims in order to discourage ransom demands. While many of the kidnappings were politically motivated, a significant proportion involved the kidnapping of children purely for financial gain. Wendell Ricketts, 'I'm Not Scared: the film', URL: http://www.virtualitalia.com/videos/salvatores_paura.shtml, [accessed 13 June 2005].

26 Kemp, 'I'm Not Scared', p. 47.

27 Megan Ratner, 'I'm Not Scared. But you'll be', URL: <http://brightlightsfilm.com/44/notscared.htm>, [accessed 13 June 2005].

28 John Walsh, 'I'm Not Scared: the other side of paradise', *The*

their ability to speak the truth – long a tradition in representations of childhood'.²⁰ This question of the child's perspective impacts crucially on formulations of spectatorship in relation to films that seek to represent the child's point of view visually. For some critics the problem relates precisely to an over-investment in sentiment, the use of 'children as the catalyst for evoking an emotional response in the audience'.²¹ This criticism was one levelled at the neorealists, for example, who were accused by some of using children in their films to 'avoid certain political and social responsibilities'.²² In this account, reliance on the child's viewpoint is seen as inherently naive, not sufficiently socially or culturally aware to produce worthwhile or reliable insights; however, as I hope to demonstrate, it is perhaps precisely this affective response on the part of an audience that might be productive.

There is certainly no doubt also that the 'dramatising of children continues to function as a social and stylistic commentary on Italian culture in both historical and contemporary terms';²³ the question is whether recent international successes such as *Malèna*, *Respiro* (Emanuele Crialese, 2002), *Aprile* and *La Stanza del figlio*/*The Son's Room* (Nanni Moretti, 1998 and 2001) or *Io non ho paura*/*I'm Not Scared* (Gabriele Salvatores, 2003) are able to escape the reductive clichés often associated with this type of film.²⁴

To consider this question I propose to examine in some detail Salvatores's most recent film *Io non ho paura*, released theatrically in the UK in the summer of 2004 and adapted from Niccolò Ammaniti's best-selling novel of the same name (Ammaniti cowrote the screenplay with Francesca Marciano). On one level a thriller about a kidnapping set in Italy's infamous *anni di piombo* (the years of lead, or the bullet),²⁵ Salvatores's film has been described variously as 'a banal fable of good triumphing over evil',²⁶ 'a renewal of compelling, socially aware Italian filmmaking',²⁷ and 'a work of high cinematic art'.²⁸ Tracing a clear link back to the neorealist films of the mid to late 1940s, while also recalling non-Italian films such as Erice's *El espíritu de la colmena*/*The Spirit of the Beehive* (1973) and referencing Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter* (1955), *Io non ho paura* is more profoundly an exploration of a family in crisis and an exploration of boyhood friendship from the perspective of a ten year old, Michele, played impressively by the non-professional Giuseppe Cristiano.

To summarize briefly, the film charts Michele's relationship with ten-year-old Filippo (Mattia di Pierro), the kidnap victim at the heart of its narrative. As a friendship of sorts develops it becomes clear to Michele that his parents, their recently arrived friends (who include Sergio [Diego Abatantuono], the apparent leader of the kidnappers) and other members of the hamlet community in which he lives, are responsible for the child's abduction and incarceration in an underground earth cellar. After Michele is discovered with Filippo (he is betrayed by his friend Salvatore [Stefano Biase]) and the *carabinieri* are seen sweeping the area by helicopter, the film moves towards its suspenseful *dénouement*. Michele,

Independent, 11 June 2004. URL: <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/film/reviews/story.jsp?story=530092>, [accessed 13 June 2005]. Lorenzo Codelli has suggested, somewhat dismissively, that Salvatores's recent work can be described as a kind of 'advertising expressionism' (*un expressionisme publicitaire*). Lorenzo Codelli, 'La 57ieme mostra de Venise', *Positif*, no. 477 (2000), p. 41.

²⁹ This ending has been described as unleashing 'the sentimentality present beneath the surface'. Kemp, 'I'm Not Scared', p. 47. Kemp argues that 'everything is too neatly tied up, the redemptive Christian symbolism too reductively rammed home' (p. 47). An alternative view argues for 'a uniquely satisfying conclusion. The final tableau ... has the chiaroscuro simplicity of a Caravaggio painting.' Walsh, 'I'm Not Scared'.

³⁰ Landy, *Italian Film*, p. 248.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

³² Kemp, 'I'm Not Scared', p. 46.

³³ Ricketts, 'I'm Not Scared', p. 4.

³⁴ Galt, 'Italy's landscapes of loss', p. 172.

³⁵ I'm referring here to the *anni di piombo* of the 1970s but also to the significance of the north-south divide for Italian politics and culture. For discussion and analysis of these concerns, see Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: 1943-1980* (London: Penguin, 1990); Galt, 'Italy's landscapes of loss'.

overhearing that the kidnappers intend to shoot Filippo, goes to his rescue, but having helped him to escape he himself becomes trapped and is mistakenly shot by his own father, Pino (Dino Abbrescia). The film ends as Michele, lying cradled in his father's arms, witnesses Filippo's reappearance, apparently offering himself as a sacrifice for his friend. As Sergio raises his gun to shoot Filippo the *carabinieri* arrive in the helicopters seen earlier and he raises his hands in surrender.²⁹

The film thus deploys a set of what could be characterized as conventions associated with representations of the child in Italian cinema (visible certainly in the films of the neorealists). Thus the children express and symbolize movement and freedom and demonstrate the irrepressible exuberance of youth.³⁰ A palpable camaraderie exists amongst the children despite the violence of some of their games and the harsh and remote conditions of their existence (although this camaraderie is also tinged with betrayal). The children are frequently portrayed as reliant on each other and removed from the world of their parents – evidenced in the sequence in which they return from the fields to discover their homes empty and all of the adults in conference. The children can be seen to represent throughout the film the 'incongruity between their perceptions and those of the adults who manage their world'.³¹

Set in a fictional deep-southern hamlet, the film sets up an opposition between an idyllic vision of the countryside and the underground cellar in which Michele discovers Filippo. The film presents a powerful contrast between the dungeon in which Filippo is imprisoned and the domestic and familial space of Michele's home. When Michele first discovers Filippo he flees in terror but, as Philip Kemp has pointed out, once the two boys become 'friends', the 'threatening darkness [of the dungeon] relocates to the cramped interiors of Michele's house'.³² The contrast between the open space of the fields and the enclosed claustrophobic space of the dungeon is continually reinforced in the film, with the sequences above ground privileging a perspective that continually takes in the huge vista of the horizon, as opposed to the simple roundel of sky visible to Filippo from deep within his place of incarceration.

The film plays knowingly with a vision of southern Italy that is both utopic and dystopic: the almost excessively beautiful landscapes visible in the film are at the same time located in the most economically deprived region of Italy, an area associated with organized crime and in particular an epidemic of kidnapping during the 1970s (the film is set in 1978). In seeking to represent the south in this fashion, Salvatores has made it clear that he sees the film as challenging the stereotypical Italian heritage film, popular in the international marketplace for its images of 'the beautiful ocean, the nostalgic past, mafia, pizza and mandolins'.³³ Although *Io non ho paura* may appear to offer the pleasures of 'touristic spectacle',³⁴ associated with such films (in part a function of its international success), it escapes reduction to mere image because of its complex relation to a period of historical and political trauma played out in part across the north-south divide.³⁵ Rosalind Galt has argued persuasively in relation

36 Galt, 'Italy's landscapes of loss', p. 159.

37 Ricketts, 'I'm Not Scared', p. 4. See Galt, 'Italy's landscapes of loss', pp. 169–73 for an account of the representation of southern Italy in the neorealist films of the 1940s.

38 It might be argued that a film such as Moretti's *Caro Diario* presents, through the use of humour, a more positive though no less critical view of this infantilized Italian family (albeit rather more from the point of view of the infantilized parents as opposed to the child). See Mazierska and Rascaroli, *The Cinema of Nanni Moretti* for a more detailed exploration of this issue.

39 Ricketts, 'I'm Not Scared', p. 2.

40 Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, p. 3.

to *Cinema Paradiso*, *Il Postino* (Michael Radford, 1995) and Salvatores's 1991 film *Mediterraneo* that 'these [heritage] films ... deploy the spectacular pleasures of the Italian landscape to construct a re-evaluation and a re-experiencing of Italian postwar history'.³⁶ Thus in Salvatores's film the utopic cinematic vision of the south – lush cornfields, bright sunshine – is re-presented to the spectator in all its dystopian reality – economic hardship, unemployment and violence. The Italian south functions here, as it often appears in Italian literature and film, as 'a screen upon which other preoccupations are projected. The south of Italy, as Salvatores acknowledges, "is our guilty secret"'.³⁷

Returning to the theme of *la famiglia* with which this essay began, *Io non ho paura* can be seen clearly as a film about a family in crisis, recounted from the point of view of a child at the centre of that family. Although the film is set during a time of political and social crisis in Italian history, one might also suggest that there is equally a connection to the contemporary crisis in relation to the Italian family. Thus the contemporary, infantilized family referred to earlier is relevant here as we see the parents in the film in some senses infantilized by their selfish and brutal behaviour but also rendered childlike in their relationship with the children, and more specifically the child Michele. The child therefore acts as a bearer of a morality that the adults have relinquished in the pursuit of wealth. It is Michele who, in a familiar reversal, instructs his father in the values of basic humanity.³⁸

The camera is used to great effect in this film, functioning either as a cold and distanced observer (and here the postcard beauty of the brightly lit exterior shots enhance this sensation of observation and surveillance; as does the association of the camera with the birds of prey that circle above the bright yellow fields) or it acts intimately, becoming a passionate participant, as in the sequence when Michele cycles away in fright after his first full encounter with the feral-looking Filippo. The camera consistently remains at 'ten-year-old' height, representing events from Michele's point of view and confining the spectator to this diminished perspective, requiring them to share in the dynamics of the various onscreen relationships, whether between Michele and his friends or Michele and his parents or, in one especially memorable scene, between Michele and Sergio. 'By "forcing" his audience to digest events precisely as his boy hero does ... Salvatores provides one of the film's most distinct pleasures: the time to think about what is happening'.³⁹ As I suggested earlier, the child as witness is a key feature of Italian neorealist film. This child witness, as described by Deleuze, is one who 'in the adult world ... is affected by a certain motor helplessness, but one which makes him all the more capable of seeing and hearing'.⁴⁰ Thus for Deleuze, the child remains ultimately passive, despite the active spectatorial affects that his or her optical witness might provoke. Salvatores's film revisits this specific cinematic heritage but, as a contemporary film set in the 1970s, it allows the spectator to share in Michele's innocent and immediate witness of events while also enabling

the active critical reflection that accrues from the adult spectator's historical knowledge of events during this period. What marks Michele as different to Bruno in *Ladri di biciclette*, for example, is his eventual, active engagement with Filippo's situation. The 'trauma' of witness experienced by Michele does not render him inert. Michele's curiosity transforms him from passive 'optical witness' to physical rescuer. The circuit of mutual protection engendered by the 'preoccupied glance' referred to at the beginning of this article is broken when Michele decides actively to rupture the parent-child, child-parent circularity and instead look towards Filippo, initially the object of his childish curiosity but latterly his friend and 'reflective image'.⁴¹ In a discussion of *La notte di San Lorenzo/The Night of the Shooting Stars* (Paolo and Vittorio Taviani, 1982), equally applicable to *Io non ho paura*, Landy notes that, 'the perspective of the child creates a sense of indeterminacy as to the reliability of . . . narrative . . . and redirects the focus of the film . . . to the question of knowledge'.⁴² It is to this question of knowledge that I now turn, as in some senses it is precisely the question of knowledge that is at stake in Michele's move from witness to participant. Having situated Salvatores's film within the context of debates concerning Italian society, the Italian family and cinematic representations of children, I conclude by considering this key aspect of Michele's character that motivates his discovery of and relationship with Filippo, namely his curiosity.

Adam Phillips, in his book on childhood curiosity and its significance for psychoanalysis, *The Beast in the Nursery*, argues that the curiosity of children can be traced back to their early sexual enquiries and investigations. He suggests that this quality was recognized by Freud as one of the most dynamic elements of childhood: 'For Freud infantile sexuality was a kind of apotheosis of curiosity; it was both its origin for the individual, and the paradigm for all its later forms'.⁴³ Phillips connects this curiosity with adult theorizing and creativity, and suggests that it lies behind our most basic intellectual impulses. In the context of Salvatores's film, Michele fits perfectly this image of the curious child who seeks to theorize, from a position of insufficient knowledge, that which he has discovered or observed. Michele does not understand how or why Filippo might have come to be placed in the dungeon, but nonetheless seeks to reach a creative explanation for this, as evidenced by his nocturnal scribbles in his notebook, in which he incorporates his passion for comic-book characters and narratives with his encounter with Filippo. (There is a connection here also with dreaming and the idea of the day residue converted by the dream process at night; Michele converts his daytime experience – that he has difficulty understanding – into stories written at night in bed.)⁴⁴ Phillips suggests that 'what is clear in Freud's account of children's sexual curiosity is that it was akin to, or a form of, appetite: it had to be satisfied, but by a fantasy, a story. It was as though the child's instinctual life partly took the form of a hunger for coherent narrative, for satisfying fiction'.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Kemp, 'I'm Not Scared', p. 47.

⁴² Landy, *Italian Film*, p. 255.

⁴³ Adam Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), p. 16.

⁴⁴ There appears to be a sexual dimension to Michele's nocturnal activity and it certainly could be seen as a form of sublimation.

⁴⁵ Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery*, pp. 18–19.

Salvatores's film takes the spectator back to this early investigative period of childhood curiosity by implicating him/her, through the camerawork already referred to, in the child's point of view; he allows the spectator to share in the child's witness of the irrationality of the adults' actions and behaviour while at the same time the pace and historical context of the drama enables the spectator to reflect upon the political and social implications of these events.

There are a number of crucial scenes in the film which involve Michele in the kind of secretive, almost voyeuristic observation familiar from certain well-known theories of cinematic spectatorship. These sequences clearly reference the Freudian primal scene in relation to their temporal structure, in that the information revealed in them is only understood by Michele by deferred action; however, what interests me more here is his spectatorial curiosity.⁴⁶ Perhaps the most crucial scene of observation in the film is the one in which Michele learns the truth about Filippo's identity and hears the televised message to him from his mother, which he subsequently relays to Filippo. Here Michele discovers the other, dysfunctional 'family' of the kidnap group, but also uses knowledge gained from his observations literally to 'make sense' of Filippo.⁴⁷

One might argue that in the somewhat overly redemptive ending to *Io non ho paura* it is precisely a childish desire for a satisfying fiction that is knowingly revealed and explored. Certainly the resolution is one that fits with Michele's fantasies of comic book heroes 'saving the day'. However, it also satisfies the spectators' adult desire for closure within a structure that has allowed the spectators to revisit and indulge *their* curiosity in a manner that connects them back to their own childhoods. All curiosity, Freud suggests, 're-awakens the traces, which have since become unconscious, of this first period of sexual interest'.⁴⁸ As Phillips adds: 'These traces are traces of both knowledge and method; both what the child has made (made up), and how he went about making it. Our . . . ways of being interested link us to the past.'⁴⁹ For the adult spectator, the affective impact of Salvatores's film may relate to its ability not only to return them to the curious theorizing of their own childhoods but to allow the construction of a historical narrative which enables them safely to explore the traumatic events of recent Italian history. The spectator is invited perhaps to rediscover their own *bambino negato*, to return to a period of early theorizing in which curiosity does not crystallize into the rigid political and social frameworks represented in the familial structures, both actual and metaphoric (the terrorist group), of Salvatores's film. The child in *Io non ho paura* offers a way out of the impasse of 1970s Italian politics and offers a mode of theorizing that remains open and optimistic. Thus, one might suggest in conclusion, the missing child which has been lost in Italian society has been found in Salvatores's powerful drama of kidnap and rescue, his film that in defiance of fear, promotes childhood curiosity.

⁴⁶ See Paul Sutton, 'Afterwardsness in film: Patrice Leconte's *Le Mari de la Coiffeuse* (1990)', *French Studies*, vol. 53, no. 3 (1999), pp. 307–17; and 'Afterwardsness in Film', *Journal for Cultural Research*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2004), pp. 385–405, for the theorization of 'afterwardsness' or deferred action in cinematic spectatorship.

⁴⁷ Michele witnesses Felice (one of the kidnap gang) dancing and singing at the kidnap 'house', and at one point he observes Felice diving onto the ground to do pressups, a clear sublimation of Felice's repressed sexual desire (picked up on in the later sequence in which he attacks Michele's mother and we witness shots of her breasts and open legs from Felice's perspective). This scene again points up Michele's curiosity and also connects with the primal scene and hence with spectatorship.

⁴⁸ Freud, cited in Phillips, *The Beast in the Nursery*, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Ibid. Clearly there is a connection with Freud's notion of the 'family romance' here, but it is a more complex construction than the fantasies being referred to in this particular instance.

I would like to thank the readers of the manuscript for their instructive comments; and Paul McDonald for his invaluable advice. This article is dedicated to Emily and Toby Sutton, two thoroughly curious spectators.

'I'm not a lady!': *Tiger Bay* (1959) and transitional girlhood in British cinema on the cusp of the 1960s

MELANIE WILLIAMS

Tiger Bay (J. Lee Thompson, 1959) may be best remembered as the debut film of Hayley Mills, the daughter of John Mills who went on to become the most successful juvenile star of the 1960s,¹ but her appearance in the film was more indebted to coincidence than to design. Her part was originally intended for a boy, following its source material, a French novella entitled *Rudolphe et le Revolver*. It was quite by chance that when the film's director went to visit his friend John Mills to discuss the actor's part in the film, he happened to see Mills's young daughter Hayley playing at the end of the garden, sparking off the idea to change the sex of the child in the film and, moreover, to have Hayley play the role, despite her lack of acting experience. Mills recounts how Thompson put the idea to him: "'Listen, this may seem quite mad to you, but I've got a terrific hunch. I want to make a switch and change the little boy into a little girl. I know it's right. The whole story will be much more touching and moving in every way.'" ² My essay will examine this premiss and look at the divergent meanings produced by the placement of a young girl at the centre of the film. In particular, it will rehearse two different ways of reading the girl heroine in *Tiger Bay*: one in terms of her adherence to standard accounts of prepubescent female development; the other in terms of her more radical embodiment of girlhood on the cusp of the 1960s, a decade in which the tenets of femininity began to be called into question.

In *Tiger Bay* Hayley Mills plays Gillie Evans, an eleven-year-old Londoner living in Cardiff with her Aunty and whose ultimate ambition

¹ Brian McFarlane refers to her as, for a time, 'the most popular child star in the world; indeed, one of the top box-office draws of any age'. Brian McFarlane, *An Autobiography of British Cinema* (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 408. Her popularity in Britain is suggested by her inclusion in 1961, 1962 and 1963 in the top five of *Motion Picture Herald's* annual end-of-year list of the ten most popular film stars. David Shipman comments that she hovered just beneath the top ten in equivalent lists in the USA during that period. David Shipman, *The Great Movie Stars: the International Years* (London: Warner Books, 1989), p. 387.

² John Mills, *Up in the Clouds, Gentlemen Please* (London: Orion, 2001), p. 334.

3 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (London: Picador, 1988), p. 315.

4 *The Spectator*, 3 April 1959.

5 de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, p. 295.

is to get herself a cap-pistol so she can join in the neighbourhood games of Cowboys and Indians from which she is currently excluded. When she inadvertently witnesses a murder in her tenement block – nosing through a letterbox she sees a young Polish sailor, Korchinsky, shoot his unfaithful girlfriend in a fit of jealous rage – she seems not so much shocked by the act as excited that she has seen where the murderer hides his weapon afterwards: at last, she will be able to get her gun, and a real one as well. As the narrative develops, it explores the burgeoning relationship between the murderer and the girl, who end up on the run together, as they move from mutual suspicion to a strong and affectionate bond. Korchinsky, played by the handsome young German star Horst Buchholz, becomes a kind of surrogate parent to Gillie (who appears to be an orphan or, at the very least, abandoned by her parents), much more willing to engage with her and play silly games than the strict Auntie who cares for her. He is also a more kindly potential father-figure than the stern Inspector Graham, the detective investigating the murder, who uses everything at his disposal to cajole Gillie into betraying her new friend but fails to build a rapport with her; this role is given extra piquancy in being played by her real father, John. But the relationship of the young man to the girl is more complex than just a paternal one, and this is where the change of sex has its most notable effect. One could argue that for Gillie, Korchinsky assumes the status of the figure described by Simone de Beauvoir as the ‘sovereign father’,³ a combination of father, brother and lover, all collapsed into one symbolic figure who acts as the defining influence on the young girl’s sexual development and the template of her future relationships with men. This is all the more pressing because Gillie is eleven years old, ‘on the shambling, charming edge of adolescence’,⁴ as critic Isabel Quigly puts it, and in the final year in which boyishness is acceptable in girls, according to de Beauvoir: ‘up to the age of twelve the little girl is as strong as her brothers, and she shows the same mental powers; there is no field where she is debarred from engaging in rivalry with them’.⁵ After this, the paths of girls and boys diverge dramatically, and it is on the cusp of this huge life-change that we encounter Gillie.

Gillie (Hayley Mills) barred from the action. *Tiger Bay* (J. Lee Thompson, 1959).



6 Sigmund Freud, 'Femininity', *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XXII (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 118.

7 Sue Harper, *Women in British Cinema: Mad, Bad and Dangerous to Know* (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 84; Steve Chibnall, *J. Lee Thompson* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 240.

8 Sigmund Freud, 'Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes', *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIX (London: The Hogarth Press, 1964), p. 252.

9 The title of the film offers another symbolic image of hidden feminine danger, or *vagina dentata*, with its combination of bay, the concave 'female' inlet, and tiger, the ferocious wild animal.

10 Freud, 'Femininity', p. 130.

It is almost irresistible to look at *Tiger Bay* through the lens of Freud's theories on girlhood and female adolescence, since Gillie's progress through the film so strongly suggests a Freudian developmental arc. Freud memorably stated that 'the little girl is a little man',⁶ and Gillie's boyish haircut and clothes seem to concur, acting as mute protest against being 'ladylike', along with her tough demeanour and her verbal protestations as she fights with the boys that she's 'not a lady'. Gillie begins the film absolutely desperate to possess a gun, which both Sue Harper and Steve Chibnall have read as an expression of the character's penis envy,⁷ a highly plausible interpretation given the details of the sequence that introduces the character and shows her exclusion from the game of Cowboys and Indians. A closeup of Gillie looking out disconsolately from behind a set of railings, as though behind bars, is followed by shots of the action from which she is barred, and, most pointedly, a closeup of a shiny toy gun in the hands of one of the boys. The scene then returns to a closeup of Gillie's discontented face, now in profile and gazing fixedly upon this forbidden object of desire. This sense of yearning is consolidated by a further lengthy closeup of Gillie staring at another gleaming toy gun being reloaded in the immediate foreground of the shot. The image provides a striking visual analogue to Freud's forcefully simple formulation of penis envy: 'she has seen it and knows that she is without it and wants to have it'.⁸ Although Gillie is in possession of a toy bomb, which she tries to use as her entree to the game, this enclosed womblike weaponry is not regarded as the equal of a proper gun by the boys.⁹ The little girl's schooling in accepting her inferior status is completed by the arrival of Korchinsky into her world, as he stops to ask directions to his girlfriend's new flat. Gillie is crouched down on the ground at the time and in a high-angle shot we see her looking up at him, suggesting her point of view but also emphasizing the handsome stranger's imposing stature. This short sequence neatly enacts what Freud describes as the defining moment in the creeping emasculation of little girls – the realization that they can no longer compete with men and must accept the 'wave of passivity ... which opens the way to the turn towards femininity'¹⁰ – with the little girl down on the ground dwarfed by the tall adult male who appears to tower over her.

It is shortly afterwards that Gillie witnesses the murder, and the presentation of this pivotal scene is significant. As she watches the events unfold through the letterbox, the sequence alternates between shots of the hidden, wide-eyed child observer and the strange frightening struggle conducted by the adult couple (rendered all the more unfathomable and 'foreign' to Gillie by being conducted mostly in Polish), giving the scene the strong flavour of the Freudian 'primal scene', the child's first encounter with the sexual act. Versions of this traumatic formative experience have been at the crux of dramas from *The Go-Between* (Joseph Losey, 1970) to *The Singing Detective* (w. Dennis Potter, d. Jon Amiel, BBC, 1986) and *Blue Velvet* (David Lynch, 1986), although rarely with a hidden female observer. What is interesting is that,

unlike her male counterparts, Gillie seems to be unaffected by what she witnesses. She scurries away to hide when she realizes she might have been seen, but fear is overcome by desire when Korchinsky uses her hiding place (the electricity meter cupboard) to secrete the gun. Gillie is compelled to reach out her hand to retrieve it, despite the risk of capture. It is because she is in possession of the murder weapon, and the only witness to his crime, that Korchinsky realizes the danger she poses to him and kidnaps her. However, 'kidnap' is perhaps not quite the right word, because Gillie is more than ready to run away with him when she realizes that he is no threat to her and that they actually have a lot in common. He promises that they will run away to sea together and the film thus develops into what Hayley Mills described as 'a love story between this tough girl and this Polish seaman'¹¹ who are fellow fugitives: Korchinsky from the police and Gillie from boredom and loneliness. While their relationship is always kept at a platonic level, it is not without intimations of other possibilities, not least in the extra layer of meaning generated by Mills's real-life crush on Horst Buchholz.¹² Early in their journey together, the pair are dusted with stray confetti from a passing wedding party, symbolic of a kind of marriage between them, now or in the future. For as Chibnall has noted, while Korchinsky is a replacement for Gillie's absent father, he is also 'an anticipation of the lovers she has yet to meet'.¹³

Interestingly, when French cinema made a foray into similar territory a few years later, with *Les Dimanches de Ville D'Avray/Sundays and Cybele* (Serge Bourguignon, 1962), the inflection of the man/girl relationship was subtly different. In the French film, a shell-shocked pilot (Hardy Kruger, another young German star like Buchholz) forms a friendship with a young girl (Patricia Gozzi) who has been abandoned at boarding school by her father. What begins as innocent surrogate parenting for a fatherless child gradually develops into a relationship with more than just a suggestion of romantic interest, if not in the present moment then in the future: the girl even discusses the age gap between them (she is twelve and he is thirty) and talks about the possibility of marriage once she is eighteen. *Tiger Bay* delicately avoids any discussion of this kind, but, nevertheless, at least one newspaper reviewer felt the need to tell his readers, after outlining the film's plot, 'Don't mistake my meaning: this heroine is no Lolita',¹⁴ implying that without his warning, some viewers may have read exactly this into the film. This mention of *Lolita* is particularly resonant, as Mills would later be the first choice for the title role in *Lolita* (Stanley Kubrick, 1962), and might have played her if Disney, which had her under contract at the time, had not thought it would be bad for her image.¹⁵ Yet in spite of Disney's best intentions, there is still an unavoidable sexual subtext to Mills's image beneath the ostensible tomboy jolliness, as suggested by the prurient interest in her first screen kiss in *The Moon Spinners* (James Neilson, 1964) – 'But about that kiss - was it a wonderful experience? Did it start bells ringing? Did she hear faraway music? Did her young heart go *wham?*', asked *Photoplay*'s reporter¹⁶ – to the number of films she made that hinge upon

11 McFarlane, *An Autobiography of British Cinema*, p. 409.

12 On her DVD commentary for the film (Carlton Visual Entertainment, 2004), Mills confesses that she was devastated at the end of shooting when a party was held to celebrate his engagement to his girlfriend, because she had convinced herself that she would marry him one day.

13 Chibnall, *J. Lee Thompson*, p. 243.

14 *Daily Sketch*, 26 March 1959.

15 Mills speculated that her life and career might have taken a different path had she been allowed to play the role: 'if I had done, who knows what would have happened? I might not have had such a difficult time growing up.' *News of the World*, 29 April 1979. Like many former child stars, Mills found growing up hard and struggled with bulimia throughout her adolescence and beyond.

16 'The day Hayley got in a hearse', *Photoplay*, August 1964.

the loss of her virginity – *The Family Way* (Roy Boulting, 1966), *Pretty Polly* (Guy Green, 1967), *Take a Girl Like You* (Jonathan Miller, 1970). The fascination seems to centre on the process of Mills's transformation from girl to woman, and her prolonged occupation of the liminal area in between, as indicated by this typical newspaper profile of the star from 1966 that dwells on the mixture of girlish and womanly characteristics present in the star's behaviour:

There is still a lot of child left in her face, but the woman in her is beginning to take over. Her lips have taken on a fullness that wasn't there last summer. She has learned a few five-dollar swear words, but her voice, like some nostalgic echo, occasionally returns to the fifth form and the sound of playgrounds. She can handle the kind of drink you need a licence to sell. She smokes.¹⁷

Even in her early twenties, when Mills married director Roy Boulting, thirty-three years her senior, the press characterized their relationship in terms of Lolita and Humbert Humbert,¹⁸ suggesting the degree to which the former child star was dogged by the nymphet-ish dimensions of her public persona.

One could argue that this element of Mills's image is latent in her debut film, as Korchinsky alerts Gillie to what will shortly lie ahead for her as a woman: 'Soon, in a few years, you'll be grown up, beautiful, someone will love you, want to marry you and then you have all the power in the world for good or bad, just with your little finger, a few words, to make happy or unhappy'. Here womanhood is characterized as acknowledging oneself as the passive receptacle of contemplation and desire, able to exercise power but only by being a *belle dame sans merci*.¹⁹ Gillie's reaction to Korchinsky's prophecy is to become quiet and pensive, and it seems that the 'wave of passivity' that Freud characterized as the beginning of maturity has begun to swell. At this precise point, the film cuts to the police inspector back in Cardiff questioning a suspect, but his words, 'Now, what about the gun?', apply equally to Gillie, whose once passionate desire for her own weapon seems to have been completely forgotten now she has forged her first significant alliance with a man and been told about the sexual armoury which she will soon have at her disposal.

However, it does not feel quite right to pursue an over-sexualized reading of Gillie in *Tiger Bay*. In fact, the film's climax is at pains to remind us that Gillie, despite her precocity, is still ultimately a child, with a child's limited understanding of the world. Her game of hide-and-seek on the ship that should be Korchinsky's means of getaway keeps the police on board and jeopardizes his escape. When Gillie falls overboard while at play, Korchinsky is faced with a choice either to save himself and let her perish or to dive into the sea to save her and almost certainly be picked up by the river police nearby. Of course, he decides to save her, and the film closes with an embrace between the girl and the young man, affirming their reciprocal love.

17 *Daily Express*, 13 January 1966.

18 For example, see article entitled 'How Hayley left Alice for Lolita', *Evening Standard*, 27 October 1969.

19 One of the most interesting features of *Tiger Bay* is the performance of Yvonne Mitchell as Anya, the girlfriend murdered by Korchinsky who justifies her infidelity in proto-feminist terms ('I'm not an animal for a little boy to keep in a cage. I'm a woman, a woman with a heart and a body that is my own to give how I like to who I like!'). Her angry protests against her subjugation offer a coruscating counter-narrative to Korchinsky's more poetic view of what womanhood means.

Gillie is the picture of blithe
amorality. *Tiger Bay* (J. Lee
Thompson, 1959).



If one were to consider the bare bones of its plot in isolation, one might conclude that *Tiger Bay* presents a rather deterministic and conservative vision of female development, a pattern that might be summarized 'little girl rejects tomboy hubris and learns what it is to be a woman with appropriate guidance from an obliging man'. However, it is worth bearing in mind that several other elements of the film contradict and complicate this simple trajectory. *Tiger Bay*'s presentation of its girl heroine sometimes points towards a more ambivalent concept of what it is to be young and female. Perhaps a better point of comparison with French cinema than *Sundays and Cybele* would be *Zazie dans le Metro* (Louis Malle, 1960), because it could be argued that what is most memorable about *Tiger Bay* is not its suggestion of age-gap crypto-romance but the image of a defiantly anarchic young girl wreaking havoc on all those around her. We see Gillie play wicked practical jokes – letting off her cap bomb outside a grumpy neighbour's flat makes him cut himself shaving, to which Gillie responds with a markedly unsympathetic 'Aw, cut himself bad, has he? Cut his bleedin' 'ead off?', and runs off laughing. She also sarcastically mimics adult admonishments of her behaviour and points out their own hypocrisy ('Didn't nobody ever teach you to say thank you? Some people got no manners') and she cannot even run an errand without getting into a fight, dropping food on the floor, stealing money and then lying about it. The scene where Gillie is questioned by Superintendent Graham is remarkable in its inversion of what we might expect to be the power dynamic of an adult questioning a child. Although the scene uses a pattern of high-angle shots of Gillie alternated with low-angle shots of

20 John Hill, *British Cinema of the 1980s: Issues and Themes* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), p. 175. An earlier example of a young woman monopolizing public space can be found in *Billy Liar* (John Schlesinger, 1963) in the iconic first appearance of Liz (Julie Christie), who saunters up a northern high street breezily swinging her handbag and spontaneously pulling faces in the mirrored shop windows, clearly at ease in her role as urban *flâneuse*.

Graham to suggest the adult looming over and intimidating the child, Gillie is far from cowed by the representative of authority who stands before her. Instead, she is the very picture of blithe amorality, slowly rocking in the rocking chair and coolly chewing gum while lying outrageously, all the time waiting to retrieve her gun from its temporary hiding place under the sink. Her deceptions are convincing and clever, providing Graham with a uselessly vague description of an imaginary suspect who is 'fat-ish, fair-ish, tall-ish, ordinary-ish' ('Thanks very much Gillie, you've been a great help', is his sarcastic response) and outwitting him on the question of the murder suspect's hat (when she says the man was wearing a hat, Graham quickly asks how, if that were the case, she could have known that he was fair, not dark. Without pausing a beat, she replies that he was 'holding it. In the house, you see'.) Graham departs, disappointed, while Gillie hurries off to church to sing in the choir. The shots which show her running through the streets, accompanied by jaunty woodwind music, bring to mind later hurried trips through town made by the young male heroes of the 1960s British New Wave films. John Hill picks up on this particular New Wave trope in his discussion of *Rita, Sue and Bob Too* (Alan Clarke, 1986) describing how, by the 1980s, working-class girls had taken over public urban space from the men who had once dominated it,²⁰ but Gillie's journey here, and the manner in which it is filmed, anticipates this later female takeover. It exemplifies her confident movement through the world, even when a murderer is on the loose and she has lied to the police about him.

The sequence culminates in some witty playing-off of angelic surface against less-than-angelic reality, made all the more subversive by the employment of religious iconography. Gillie arrives at the church and, as she struggles into her chorister's robes, she pauses to pull out her gun from her jeans and contemplate its steely beauty, utterly oblivious to the stern words of the sermon intoning in the background. While she appears to be the model child, the innocent choirgirl, we know that all the while she has concealed weaponry about her person, redolent of the angry passions of the adult world. Later she will show off her secret arsenal to the boy next to her in the pews – and swap one of the bullets for a toy car and a bar of chocolate – and then, without a pause, launch into her perfect pure-voiced solo, 'And though I walk in death's dark vale, yet will I fear no ill'. The film thus draws attention to Gillie's control of her performance as a wide-eyed child and shows that she is capable of switching registers at a moment's notice when the situation requires it.

The critical reception of *Tiger Bay* was dominated by glowing comments on Mills's star-making performance, at the expense of almost everything else about the film ('Miss Mills not only runs off with the entire picture. She has made everything else I have seen in the cinema this week seem unimportant'),²¹ although the *Evening Standard's* reviewer also noticed that the film was offering something new in terms

21 *Daily Sketch*, 26 March 1959.

22 *Evening Standard*, 26 March 1959.

23 Janey Place, 'Women in film noir', in E. Ann Kaplan (ed.), *Women in Film Noir* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), p. 36.

24 Ingrid Sischy, 'The Hayley Grail', *Interview*, August 1997.

25 Ann De Vaney, 'Pretty in pink? John Hughes re-inscribes daddy's girl in homes and schools', in Frances Gateward and Murray Pomerance (eds), *Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice: Cinemas of Girlhood* (Detroit, IL: Wayne State University Press, 2002), p. 207.

26 *Swinging Chicks of the 1960s*. URL: http://www.swinginchicks.com/hayley_mills.htm [accessed 8 September 2004].

of its representation of girlhood, arguing that Gillie came as 'a relief from the goody-two-shoes roles in which little girls are invariably cast'.²² The overall impression left of the young girl in the moments from *Tiger Bay* described above is one of fearlessness, cheekiness, quick-wittedness, mobility and, above all, ebullience: it is not hard to see how the subversive power of these images might transcend their position in the narrative framework, in the same manner as the film noir femme fatale refuses to be contained by the narrative that generates her, a process concisely summarized by Janey Place: 'It is not their inevitable demise we remember but rather their strong, dangerous, and above all, exciting sexuality'.²³ Evidence that a similar process of selective remembrance might have occurred in the reception of Mills's films is provided by Ingrid Sischy's confession to the star that

you were definitely the first person in the movies who I could identify with, not that I would have used that word at the time. It had to do not only with the parts you played, but with you as an actress. There was great spirit in those parts. The mischievousness that you got to show was of course incredibly thrilling. There you were with blue jeans on, and I don't know if you were climbing trees, but it felt like you were climbing trees in those movies. You had real character.²⁴

Here, the specific details of Mills's individual performances are supplanted by a symbolic image from memory of the young girl: mischievous, spirited, wearing jeans and climbing trees. This may not be entirely accurate ('I don't know if you were climbing trees, but it felt like you were') but its 'more true truth' encapsulates what she meant to the young spectator: an image of boisterous unconventional femininity to aspire to. As Ann De Vaney has argued, 'adolescent girls in a time of uncertainty in their lives flock to performances by teen girls as guides in the attempt to negotiate their gendered positions',²⁵ and one can see how Hayley Mills, having food fights and playing nasty practical jokes in *The Parent Trap* (1961), going on adventures in Patagonia and New Zealand in *In Search of the Castaways* (1962), and even bringing some bite to the saccharine *Pollyanna* (1960), offered an important alternative to more passively pretty images of girlhood in the media. As one fan-site has it: 'What was great about Hayley was that she wasn't afraid to look silly, make faces, stick out her tongue'.²⁶ While one might dismiss face-pulling and tree-climbing as a rather ineffectual form of revolt, Susan J. Douglas suggests how even mildly alternative imagery of girlhood in the late 1950s and early 1960s acted as a catalyst for later feminism:

no matter how dumb some of them seem now, together they pushed me closer to a wholesale break with Mom's lot in life. All of them were about masquerade, about looking the part of the teenage girl while, underneath, sneaking in less 'feminine' behaviours and traits. There were all sorts of disguised, furtive insurgencies going on that emboldened me and girls like me in surprising ways, and legitimised

27 Susan J. Douglas, *Where the Boys Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media* (London: Penguin, 1994), pp. 101–2. Hayley's fan-base includes some surprising members. Polly Toynbee, for instance, now a respected social commentator, once admitted: 'When I was eleven, I was an ardent member of the Hayley Mills fan club. I know considerably more about her than any other star I've ever interviewed. My walls were papered with her photographs, sandy eyelashes, rabbit teeth and all. I played her dreadful record, Let's Get Together, 'yeah, yeah, yeah' until I could mimic it precisely, flat notes, wobbles and all... I didn't adore her in the way later we worshipped the Beatles. I wanted to be her.' *The Guardian* 28 May 1982.

28 Neil Sinyard, *Children in the Movies* (London: BT Batsford, 1992), p. 19.

29 An interesting link can be made to J. Lee Thompson's previous films *The Weak and the Wicked* (1953) and *Yield to the Night* (1956), both set in prison, which show precisely what happens to those women condemned to such a fate.

30 Pam Cook, 'Mandy: daughter of transition', in Charles Barr (ed.), *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp. 355–61; Annette Kuhn, 'The little girl wants to be heard', in *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995).

our pushing against the already crumbling boundaries of 1950s-style femininity.²⁷

Tiger Bay presents us with several versions of adult femininity, 1950s-style, none of them particularly tempting prospects. There is the respectable domestic kind, best represented by the redoubtable Aunty, steadfast at her ironing board as she chides Gillie, but the limitations of her kind of life are suggested obliquely in the film's tiny details. Aunty takes in mending to make a living and there is a headless dressmaker's dummy covered with work-in-progress in the middle of the room, which Aunty warns Gillie to keep away from, saying 'Don't touch that, it's Mrs Potter'. It is an inconsequential figure of speech but the equation of a faceless clotheshorse with the mature, married woman is illuminating. Similarly, when Gillie fibs about losing the change from the butcher's down the drain (she actually uses it to buy her bomb) she says that 'a great big lady with a basket bumped me'. As Neil Sinyard notes, 'the form a child's escapism takes might be revealing about the world in which the child habitually lives',²⁸ and this little thoughtless fabrication by Gillie suggests a vision of adult womanhood that is adversarial and formidable. If maturity means nothing but shopping and sewing and ironing, it is easy to see why Gillie rejects it in favour of ludic subversion. But what are the other alternatives on offer? The only other adult women featured prominently in the film are a murder victim and a prostitute in trouble with the police: for those who inhabit a non-domestic version of femininity, the costs are clearly high. Aunty and her neighbour both predict a grim future for the little girl, telling her that if she carries on with such unfeminine behaviour ('little girls wanting to play with guns and bombs and dressing up like gangsters') she will end up in prison.²⁹ But perhaps the prospect is not so gloomy. Gillie, in 1959, is on the brink of adolescence at a pivotal period in modern history. A girl of her age can look forward to a different future because of larger changes in the social climate, among them, the greater emancipation of women.

Not many British films spend as much time as *Tiger Bay* in exploring the interior life of a girl, but one exception is *Mandy* (Alexander Mackendrick, 1952), the Ealing drama about a deaf girl's painful progress towards speech. *Mandy* has been the subject of sustained critical analysis from feminist critics Pam Cook and Annette Kuhn, who have recognized both the film's significance as an encapsulation of British society at a particular time and place and its remarkable and memorable affective power.³⁰ However, it is Cook's description of Mandy (both the film and the character) as a 'daughter of transition' that I want to pursue here. I would argue that just as *Mandy* offers an insight into the cultural politics and gender attitudes of the early part of the 1950s, using a little girl's personal development as a vehicle for its social meaning, so *Tiger Bay* fulfils a similar function but at the other end of the decade, in the pivotal year of 1959. If *Mandy*'s Mandy Garland is, as Cook argues, the daughter of the transition between the end of wartime austerity and the

There is an undeniable physical resemblance between *Tiger Bay's* Gillie and Jo (Rita Tushingham) in *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961).



31 Angela Carter, 'Truly, it felt like Year One', in Sara Maitland (ed.), *Very Heaven: Looking Back at the Sixties* (London: Virago, 1988), p. 209–10.

32 Liz Heron (ed.), 'Introduction', in *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing Up in the Fifties* (London: Virago, 1984), p. 6.

33 Christine Geraghty, 'Women and sixties British cinema: the development of the "Darling" girl', in Robert Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (London: British Film Institute, 1997), p. 161. Sara Maitland describes Christie as 'the symbol of all my yearning adolescent hopes', in her Introduction to *Very Heaven*, p. 4.

beginning of fifties affluence, then *Tiger Bay's* Gillie Evans is a daughter of the next important transition, one of the most relentlessly mythologized in twentieth-century history, between the fifties and the sixties.

For novelist Angela Carter, the contrast between female experience in one decade and the next was absolute: in the sixties, 'truly, it felt like Year One', whereas the fifties were 'tough . . . girls wore white gloves'.³¹ However, Liz Heron makes an important point, in her introduction to an anthology of essays about fifties girlhood, when she identifies the real turning point in women's status (in Britain at least) as the fifties instead of the sixties. In particular, she emphasizes the importance of growing up with the benefits of the welfare state and a general sense of postwar optimism:

Along with the orange juice and the cod-liver oil, the malt supplement and the free school milk, we may also have absorbed a certain sense of our own worth and the sense of a future that would get better and better, as if history were on our side . . . as little girls we had a stronger sense of our possibilities than the myths about the fifties allow.³²

This dovetails nicely with *Tiger Bay's* characterization of its confident young heroine, who is hardly typical of the kind of femininity usually associated with the 1950s but predicts an emergent female type that would become increasingly significant during the next decade. Gillie is one of the last child protagonists of the fifties but she could also be regarded as a prototype for the sixties girl: the quixotic liberated young woman described by Christine Geraghty as 'the "Darling" girl' after Christie's role as fashion model and girl-about-town Diana Scott in *Darling* (John Schlesinger, 1965). While Diana is ultimately punished through the narrative, Julie Christie's beguiling incarnation of 'an unpredictable, spontaneous, emotionally honest, sexually active young woman' proved to be the acme of desirable femininity in the sixties.³³ The scruffy tomboy might seem worlds apart from the glamorous model but there is, I want to suggest, strong evidence for tracing the roots of the sixties woman back to this fifties girl.

There are interesting parallels in the depiction of the two films' heroines, including these near-identical scenes.



34 Geraghty, 'Women and sixties British cinema', p. 157. Further evidence for the ascendancy of girls in popular culture is provided by the Variety Club of Great Britain's award for 'Most Promising Newcomer' in 1962 being shared by two teenage girls, the singer Helen Shapiro and actor Rita Tushingham.

35 Ibid., p. 156.

In order to establish the continuum between the feminine identity of the fifties and that of the sixties, I wish to draw attention to some interesting parallels between Gillie and the young heroine of another British film, released two years after *Tiger Bay* but seldom associated with it, *A Taste of Honey* (Tony Richardson, 1961), the only female-centred and female-authored British New Wave film, adapted by Shelagh Delaney from her 1958 play. *A Taste of Honey* is discussed as the progenitor of 'the "Darling" girl' in Geraghty's essay, in which she claims that with the character of quirky, free-spirited Jo, played by Rita Tushingham, 'we can begin to see the emergence of a specific discourse around young women which was highly significant for 60s British cinema'.³⁴ But I would suggest that it can be discerned farther back, and that many of the attributes possessed by Jo – those that define her as a new strain of feminine representation in British cinema – can actually be seen in Gillie. Indeed, in a spirit of intertextuality, it is possible to see Jo as a slightly older version of Gillie. There is an undeniable physical resemblance between the two, in their large expressive eyes and scruffy pageboy haircuts and even, at times, their clothes: both characters wear baggy, dark, ribbed crew-neck jumpers. Geraghty's description of Jo's girlish appearance, 'thin body, big eyes, wide cheekbones, gawky stance',³⁵ applies equally well to Gillie. Both characters use a more androgynous version of their names (Jo for Josephine, Gillie for Gillian) suggesting a desire for freedom from fussy femininity. They both behave with a similar sense of impetuosity and cheek, and, despite being misfits in their communities, maintain a core of youthful self-confidence. Both struggle with their relationships with harsh mother figures who are their only parent. Both films begin with the girls ostracized from a communal game – netball in Jo's case and Cowboys and Indians in Gillie's – and there are near-identical moments where they blow bubbles with soapy water in the sink, signalling their inherent playfulness. Both films share a distinctive visual iconography of big ships, weathered brick buildings, run-down tenements, girdered bridges and cranes, punctuated with gaggles of kids playing in the street. And, most crucially, the girls in both films are introduced to a new adult world through forming a relationship with a sensitive boy from a ship, and the wanderings of the

unconventional couple through poetically-rendered industrial waterside landscapes are rendered in a remarkably similar way. The kinship between the heroines of the two films is so marked that it goes beyond coincidence and suggests a real sense of continuity not only between the two protagonists but more broadly between two films that are usually seen as sitting on either side of the 'old guard/New Wave' divide, which in turn has implications for the historiography of 1950s and 1960s British cinema.

Tiger Bay is ahead of its time in many ways: firstly in its location in a recognizably working-class, provincial milieu, which is also markedly multiracial; secondly in its refusal to demonize youth, which was customary in social problem films of the period, instead presenting the young tomboy and the foreign criminal as our points of identification in the film over the representative of the law. More significantly, however, I would argue that in its representation of its girl heroine, *Tiger Bay* not only anticipates the subsequent developments of the British New Wave but perhaps even partially supersedes them. In *A Taste of Honey*, Jo's alliance with the black sailor results in her pregnancy, precipitating her groundbreaking protestation against anatomy as destiny: 'I don't want to be a mother, I don't want to be a woman'. In *Tiger Bay* there is the less well developed but equally angry and instinctive cry 'I'm not a lady!' – but, crucially, the film does not end with Gillie submitting to inevitable motherhood and returning to the family unit (however haphazard) like Jo. In contrast, *Tiger Bay* closes with its free-spirited heroine still a child, still on the *brink* of adolescence. This is perhaps one of the things that makes the film so moving; its location in a life stage that has been described as 'a lost time for women – a time of clarity and courage at the edge of adolescence'³⁶ before the compromises and curtailed ambitions of adulthood. The ending of *Tiger Bay* is notably open and ambivalent, concluding not with Gillie back safe with Auntie but in Korchinsky's arms, on a small pilot boat in the Bristol channel (another liminal space, neither England nor Wales), with no idea of what will happen to him (he is under arrest for murder, having forfeited his last chance of escape), nor what might happen next to her. Our first glimpse of Gillie places her behind bars, gazing out forlornly from behind the railings that separated her from the game she so desperately wanted to join, but by contrast, our final view of her, with her future undecided, at least hints at the possibility of an escape. Whereas the films of the British New Wave customarily characterize women in terms of captivity – either their own through unhappy marriage or unwanted pregnancy, or their entrapment of others through their push towards domesticity³⁷ – *Tiger Bay* tentatively offers something more utopian: a boyish young girl on the run, rejecting the stifling tyranny of having to be 'ladylike'. Hayley Mills's Gillie, in a state of personal transition between girlhood and adulthood, is thus the symbol of a much larger historical transition in female destiny.

36 Sinikka Aapola, Marnina Gonic and Anita Harris, *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power and Social Change* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 47.

37 See discussions of the New Wave's female representation in John Hill, 'Working-class realism and sexual reaction: some theses on the New Wave', in James Curran and Vincent Porter (eds), *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1983), pp. 303–11; Terry Lovell, 'Landscapes and stories in 1960s British realism', *Screen*, vol. 31, no. 4 (1990); Robert Murphy, *Sixties British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1992).

Familiar aliens: *Teletubbies* and postmodern childhood

JONATHAN BIGNELL

This essay argues that the British preschool children's television programme *Teletubbies* develops some of the theoretical concerns of postmodernist criticism. My aim is to consider how this theoretical discourse and *Teletubbies* work together to rethink the notion of the child as a conceptual category and an audience category imagined for British television. I shall argue that the aesthetic of *Teletubbies* corresponds to the reflexive textuality identified by postmodernist theory, and instantiates some of the confusions between self and other, adult and child, that this theoretical discourse has debated.¹ Some of the existing work on *Teletubbies* discusses it in terms of its effects on the child audience and its relationship to educational and social goals, using arguments that adduce what is claimed to be known about actual children.² In contrast, this essay discusses arguments that derive from abstract conceptions of childhood as a condition or life-stage. However, I demonstrate here that these two approaches continually merge, and that this issue is part of the greater problem of boundaries, propriety and ambivalence that postmodernist thinking has addressed. The French theorist Jean-François Lyotard is interested in childhood as a discursive category rather than in actual children as concrete individual subjects. He discusses childhood in relation to notions of process, such as the process of constitution of the subject, and the relation between a subject and an object, event or experience. Discussing childhood opens up the issue of teleology, for the concept of the child is understood as that being who will become an adult, and the concept of adulthood is produced against the retrospective invocation of the concept of the child. Similarly, for Lyotard, a text is 'modern only if it is first postmodern'.³ A completed

1 This essay draws on a broader theoretical argument about postmodernism and children's media, in Jonathan Bignell, *Postmodern Media Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), pp. 114–38.

2 David Buckingham, 'Child-centred television?: *Teletubbies* and the educational imperative', in David Buckingham (ed.), *Small Screens: Television for Children* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 2002), pp. 38–61.

3 Jean-François Lyotard, 'Answering the question: what is postmodernism?', in Thomas Docherty (ed.), *Postmodernism: a Reader* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p. 44.

state (of adulthood, or modernity) is constituted by a moment of formation (childhood, or the postmodern) which is retrospectively constructed. This works rhetorically to establish childhood as a subversive model of subjectivity, or of new configurations of textuality and politics. Childhood is represented as a way of being in which cultural formation is still in process, so that childhood is part of culture and also borders it, anticipates it or transcends it because it is not yet fully integrated into it.

In what follows, these questions are taken further, with a predominant focus on *Teletubbies* rather than the theoretical context that I have briefly outlined. I return later to theoretical discussion of Lyotard's influential philosophical and critical writing about postmodernism, and consider the aesthetics and production contexts of *Teletubbies* in terms of the problems related to television and childhood that are raised by the programme. My main argument is that *Teletubbies* casts childhood as both familiar and alien – just as the Teletubbies themselves are – and poses television as a mediator of the uncertain boundaries between adulthood and childhood, familiar and alien, human and inhuman. In doing this, *Teletubbies* participates in a contemporary structure of feeling whereby these dualities are being questioned and rethought in media culture as well as in postmodernist theoretical discourse. Because television is a key boundary space that negotiates understandings of adulthood and childhood, self and other, now and then, here and there, it is both an instance of that structure of feeling and a means for worrying over and modelling it.

Teletubbies was made by Ragdoll Productions for BBC, in 260 episodes of thirty minutes each. It was first screened in Britain from 1997 to 2001, followed by sales to over 120 countries and translation into over forty languages. The series was shot at a large outdoor set near Ragdoll's headquarters in Stratford-upon-Avon. The set consists of a sculpted landscape of hillocks populated with flowers and large rabbits, with the Teletubbies' home, the Tubbytronic Superdome, at its centre.⁴ The Teletubbies are four pot-bellied creatures with short limbs, large heads and coloured furry skin, who are played by actors in body-suits. Tinky Winky is purple, Dipsy is green, Laa-Laa is yellow, and Po is red. Each Teletubby has a distinctive appearance, marked not only by colour but also by the individuating aerial-like structures on the tops of their heads and by their personal possessions, like Tinky Winky's handbag or Dipsy's hat. On the edge of Teletubbyland stands a tall metal windmill, which periodically begins to turn and broadcasts short sequences of actuality film showing children playing together, running on the beach, splashing in puddles or baking cakes, and so on. These sequences are beamed onto the stomach of one of the Teletubbies, who each has a silvery patch there in the shape of a television screen. The Teletubbies look forward to these broadcasts and react to them with pleasure, demanding once they finish that they be played 'again, again', as they usually are, in a slightly truncated form. Aside from this, the Teletubbies

4 The South Warwickshire director of tourism, Alex Holmes, reported: 'This summer, our visitor information patrols have been asked more about where to find the Teletubbies than about the birthplace of William Shakespeare'. Quoted in M. Bergman, 'The new fab four', *Radio Times*, 27 September–3 October 1997, p. 20.

gambol in their pastoral surroundings, play with objects, dance, sing, and take their meals of TubbyToast and TubbyCustard inside the technological space of the Tubbytronic Superdome, where Noo-Noo, their robotic cleaning machine, sweeps up after them. At intervals, props appear in Teletubbyland for them to encounter, animated clouds, rain or creatures appear, and lengthy animated sequences bring, for example, three ocean liners sailing into Teletubbyland on a miraculous flood, or animals walking two-by-two across the landscape. Much of the visual content of each episode is accompanied by music, the Teletubbies' own infant language and laughter, and adult voices represented by voiceover narration and the words of the Voice Trumpets, large telephone receiver-like objects that emerge from the ground to give instructions or make suggestions. In the sky above Teletubbyland, an animated sun with the head of a baby within it looks down on their antics, responding with amused gurgles, laughter or surprise.

***Teletubbies* and television aesthetics**

The reflexivity and intertextuality of *Teletubbies* are its most notable textual features, and there are numerous references to broadcasting, communication and storytelling. Each episode begins with a voiceover narration (by Toyah Wilcox) announcing 'Over the hills and far away, Teletubbies come to play', referencing the discourse of nursery rhymes. The Teletubbies are aware that they are being watched by their viewers, greeting their audience at the beginning of each programme and waving goodbye at the end. Each episode hollows out a space for its audience to interact, for example by joining in dances and songs, for which the camera is positioned to view the Teletubbies in long shot performing in a tableau. Similar long takes, usually in long shot, are used to present the animated figures and objects that suddenly appear in Teletubbyland. For example, after a sudden downpour from animated clouds, a large silvery lake appears and three ocean liners move across it to music based on the Christmas carol 'I Saw Three Ships Come Sailing In'. The large liners move slowly and majestically across the lake while the camera remains static, producing an otherworldly and mesmerizing effect that is also present in similar long animated sequences in other episodes. *Teletubbies* draws its narrative ideas from outside television, from nursery rhymes, children's songs and fairytales. But the visual aesthetic of the programme insists on the capacity of television to bring actuality, performance and computer animation together into a coherent textual world that dissolves the boundaries between these representational forms, and between television and the material that it reworks. Television scholarship has defined the medium as one in which a distracted domestic viewer glances at primarily realist and simple image compositions with low density of visual information, where sound predominates over image.⁵ But *Teletubbies* (like television science fiction, of which it could be seen as a variant) can both use and surpass this. Animations of nursery rhyme

5 See Rick Altman, 'Television sound', in Horace Newcombe (ed.), *Television: the Critical View* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1987), pp. 566–85. Karen Lury discusses television sound using *Teletubbies* as a case study in her *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 57–94.

animals and the story of Noah's ark in *Teletubbies*, for example, draw on traditional narratives but foreground post-produced spectacular effects and the visual aesthetics of digital morphing and movement. The programme's aesthetic dissolves distinctions between the alien and familiar by creating an interplay of new simulation technology with traditional content from television and outside it, and with live action. The frequent repetition of fantastical sights and events, and the effect of music and voiceover to reassure, make *Teletubbies* a programme in which anything strange might happen, but within a restricted set of codes where some of what happens is familiar and some of what may be alien is familiarized. On the other hand, factors such as the science-fictional alienness of the Teletubbies and their environment, and the transposition of traditional rhymes and stories into loosely structured narratives centring on repetition and visual spectacle, displace familiar elements from the conventional forms that might otherwise tame them.

There is an assumption in *Teletubbies* that television comes from somewhere else, and is supervised by the giant windmill and other authorities such as the programme's adult narrators and the instructions of the Voice Trumpets. But inasmuch as the Teletubbies are childlike and take pleasure in television by viewing the actuality sequences on their stomachs, performing for the camera in their dances and repeated actions, the episodes are emphatically structured to invite the audience to take up a viewing position that aligns the viewer with the Teletubbies 'inside' television. Television becomes both alien and familiar itself, both a show coming into the home from elsewhere, and an interactive experience that spills out of the television set and occupies the viewer's space. The relationship between the Teletubbies and the adult narrators, Voice Trumpets and the windmill is similar to the inherited conventions of British children's television, in that the Voice Trumpets' male voice tells them to go to bed at the end of each episode, and has an authoritative adult knowledge of the actions of the Teletubbies so that it can function as a knowing 'voice of God' narration. This matches the control exercised by adults over the children and childlike characters in most children's programming.⁶ On the other hand, the adult narrators do not have full control of the Teletubbies. A voiceover tells them to go to bed at the end of each episode, but they always resist, repeatedly voicing a wheedling 'No' and hiding behind the set's grassy hummocks. The Teletubbies thus have a limited but real ability to resist adulthood's control and its supervision of their actions. Television and adulthood, therefore, are represented as a means of apprehending such 'real-world' concerns as the constraints of time and authority, or the spatial and causal relations that govern action and nature. But television and childhood are also a welcome gift to the Teletubbies and to the programme's imagined audience, and an opportunity for pleasure and wonderment that adulthood does not wholly control. This productive tension between play as an activity for its own sake and the organization of activity for a purpose continues at the level of episode structure. In one episode, for

6 On the history of children's television's pseudo-parental functions, see David Oswell, 'Watching with mother in the early 1950s', in Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham (eds), *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 34–46.

example, sequences are loosely held together by the theme of water, leading to a game of jumping in a puddle in Teletubbyland, the arrival of the ocean liners mentioned above, and an actuality sequence showing nursery-school children playing in the rain. Narrative form provides some thematic coherence to episodes, but individual sequences play with and develop thematic components at length and independently. Play and distraction in *Teletubbies* link the Teletubbies' actions, the actions of children in the actuality sequences, and the text's play with the real and the imaginary. But furthermore, television's divisions into time-bounded programmes is disrupted by the Teletubbies' refusal to go to bed and let the programme end, and internal linearity is countered by the repetition and apparent randomness of the happenings in Teletubbyland. Overall, *Teletubbies* works on disrupting distinctions between the actual and the virtual, the televisual and the extra-televisual, and the boundedness of narrative and authority versus resistance to, or negotiation with, those constraints. In these ways, the identity of television itself as either 'from out there' or 'in here' for its viewer is confused, and television textuality oscillates between structure and play, constraint and excess.

When the giant windmill beams documentary segments featuring children in the 'real world' beyond Teletubbyland onto the Teletubbies' bellies for them and the audience to see, the Teletubbies and the audience are aligned with each other in witnessing these segments. The Teletubbies stand waiting for the images to appear, chortling and cooing, until one Teletubby is selected and the first live action frame appears on his or her stomach. At this moment, the camera closes in on the Teletubby's belly, accomplishing a transition into the actuality footage so that it fills the screen. Putting the actuality image onto the bellies of the Teletubbies is in one sense a pragmatic decision on the part of Ragdoll, because the programme's producers decided it was boring to represent television by including the television set as an object within the fictional world. In Ragdoll's earlier series *Rosie and Jim* (Central for ITV, 1990–2), the canal boat in which the eponymous puppet characters and their human companions live has a television set among the domestic furnishings of the boat, and although the television set shows material that the characters can interact with, it remains a relay device that is not easily integrated into the main action. By contrast, putting television images on the Teletubbies themselves means that television and its possibilities of relay are literally embedded in the characters. The television screen becomes part of the Teletubbies' skin, so it exists at the border between self and other, inside and out, body and environment. The fabric skin of the Teletubbies becomes a boundary that both encloses their bodies and opens them into another world, mediating notions of subjectivity, identity and perception by confusing the distinctions between inner and outer, and between the 'this-here' of Teletubbyland and the 'there-then' of a 'real world' of children. Their bellies are windows and screens, bodily and material, but also spaces of virtual projection, 'in' Teletubbyland but linking it with the 'real world', and

thus they pose the viewer's television screen as a boundary surface that is both 'here' for its viewer and opens onto a multiple 'there' of possibility.

Each day in Teletubbyland begins as the sun baby rises swiftly into the sky, and the end of the day is marked by the setting of this sun. By marking time, the sun seems to supervise Teletubbyland, suggesting the baby's diegetic agency and by extension the supervision of the programme by a notion of childhood and the incorporation of an empowered figure representing it. But on the other hand, the sun baby has no direct agency over anything that happens. It looks down amusedly at the Teletubbies and is spatially separate from the action of the main characters, paralleling the imagined child viewer who has no direct control over a programme made by adults from the technological and institutional world of television. Television is established as an opportunity for wonderment and joining in, thus familiarizing television but attributing its pleasures and its control ambiguously to its imagined author-figures and to a range of delegates inside the diegetic world who represent the audience. In many ways and at various levels of meaning, *Teletubbies* reflects on its own televisuality and the notions of medium, communication, institutional authority and the possibilities of play with meaning in television.

Childhood for television

Thus far I have been discussing childhood as a way of being that is represented by the Teletubbies' childlikeness and that is shaped by the programme text's modes of address to an imagined audience, but I have not taken account of how this may relate to actual children. However, Ragdoll Productions spends considerable time and effort on empirical research prior to the design and production of programmes, and this raises and perpetuates a common problem of knowledge in relation to actual children and their function as instances of the concept of childhood.⁷ Focus groups of children are interviewed at Ragdoll's headquarters, hours of video recordings of children playing and interacting with television programmes are gathered there (since the company buildings are also a popular visitor attraction for families), and the extensive opportunities built into the design of *Teletubbies* for active play and interaction with the programme allow for the multiple and often physical kind of response to television which such research reveals. For Ragdoll, setting up play environments to be videoed is a way of finding out what children 'naturally' do, producing useful knowledge to help make its programmes. This positions the actual child as an originary object of knowledge, that is already true to itself and can be learned from by adults in order to construct a concept of the child audience and its needs or competencies. However, the notion of actual children as natural, having natural behaviours that can be observed, relies on the assumption that 'childhood' is already there in actual children, untouched and available to be known. So the natural being of actual children can only be

7 A sequence showing empirical research through play at Ragdoll's headquarters appears in the documentary *Big Hug: the Making of Teletubbies* (BBC, 1998).

natural inasmuch as the concept of a natural childhood is placed at an origin that is other to the processes and acquisition of knowledge. It seems that that which is to be known exists outside knowledge and is brought into it, but the bringing of natural childhood into knowledge already requires that natural childhood has been set up as its other and its object. Once the supposed natural childhood is claimed as an object of knowledge then it is no longer natural in that originary and alien sense, since the concept of natural childhood is defined precisely by its quality as an alien unknown. Ragdoll creates the possibility of knowledge of childhood so that it can be mobilized as knowledge and then relayed back to actual children in the form of programmes aimed at a child audience, which is also necessarily a concept rather than an actuality. There is a circle of knowledge production, in which Ragdoll creates an image of childhood from actual children so that other actual children can be imagined as an audience. Ragdoll also creates a concept of the child existing in a natural state before that knowledge about actual children, whose behaviour might confirm or modify it. The concept of childhood and the activity of actual children seem to legitimate each other, but are instead two different signifieds whose roles as antecedent or subsequent can be reversed.

Some of these problematic boundaries are also evident in the programme makers' initial conception of the programme's central characters as childlike adults. *Teletubbies'* co-creator Andrew Davenport imagined the Teletubbies through an analogy between toddlers and astronauts.⁸ The original programme idea was of two astronauts in space-suits, who inhabit an English garden but are miniature in size and dwarfed by the plants and garden furniture around them. The familiar garden environment would become an alien place for exploration, and the clumsy-suited astronauts would work cooperatively to cope with its challenges. Subsequently, in collaboration with the head of Ragdoll, Anne Wood, Davenport developed this idea into the four clumsy Teletubby aliens in the rolling landscape of Teletubbyland. The Teletubbies' appearance is human, both in the parallel between toddlers' body shape and the Teletubbies' relatively large heads, short limbs and pear-shaped torsos, but also alludes to the clumsiness of human astronauts in space-suits falling over and losing dexterity when wearing the suits in low gravity. So the Teletubbies are both childlike and also like adults reduced to childlikeness by an alien environment. The function of the parallel with astronauts is to render the Teletubbies' pastoral and familiar landscape alien, as a resource for them to explore as if it were an alien place. Clearly this derives from the programme makers' conception of childhood as characterized by discovery and a relation to the world that includes the negotiation of self through encounters with other objects and people. It also draws the adult and technological enterprise of space exploration into an analogy with the physical, sensory and cognitive underdevelopment attributed to childhood, so that what Apollo 11 astronaut Neil Armstrong described as

⁸ Davenport discusses his original conception of the Teletubbies in *Big Hug*, which also shows some of his original artwork based on miniature astronauts in a garden.

9 For example, the film *Earth Girls Are Easy* (Julien Temple, 1988) makes comic play with furry coloured aliens whose knowledge of Earth is based on watching US television.

10 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Cambridge: Polity, 1991); Dan Fleming, *Powerplay: Toys as Popular Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), p. 194.

11 Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (London: WH Allen, 1983).

a 'small step for Man' is literalized as the small and tentative steps of a toddler. The parallels with astronauts and toddlers familiarize the Teletubbies' appearance and physical movement, but the Teletubbies are also in some ways uncannily monstrous and inhuman. The programme draws on science fiction's popular forms for imagining aliens, by representing them as coloured, naked alien colonists who have aerials on their heads and understand Earth from the television pictures they have intercepted.⁹ *Teletubbies* also provides opportunities for a specifically visual revelation of alien and intriguing creatures, objects and landscapes, as I have discussed above. Again, the apparent stability of contrary terms is disrupted by the Teletubbies' derivation from ideas about human-like aliens and alien-like humans, where childhood is the terrain on which these are brought together and become equivalent.

Lyotard's work on the boundaries between human and alien, and how what is human is defined, but also contaminated, by the inhuman, makes a similar argument, and further problematize *Teletubbies'* associations and distinctions between childhood, adulthood and media technology. In *The Inhuman*, Lyotard discusses the conception of the child as a figure for the component of the inhuman within the concept of the human, as Dan Fleming has also noted.¹⁰ Lyotard's analysis refers to the child as a concept and not an empirical entity, and argues that it is inhuman because childhood presupposes that a process of development, and the ideologies which shape the meaning of childhood in western culture, have not yet finished processing it into the normative human state that adulthood is understood to be. Lyotard also argues that postmodern technoculture is inhuman in the sense that it is an inorganic and external supplement to the human body and subjectivity, that entangles itself with and penetrates the human body and psyche. There are theorists, such as Neil Postman, who have argued that contemporary technological media culture puts an end to the natural innocence of childhood.¹¹ So one way of understanding the postmodernist assertion that the subjects of highly developed western societies are living at the end of history and at the end of the human is to think of these endings as the end of the child, since the child is conceived as the origin of the human. But following Lyotard's argument that connects childhood to the postmodern and to media technoculture would bring us the opposite conclusion. For Lyotard, childhood as origin of the human is inhuman itself, because childhood is defined as that condition which has not yet become the rational subjectivity of adulthood that characterizes humanity in modernity. So childhood, the postmodern and technoculture are analogous to each other as supplements that challenge the borders of the human. Postman invokes childhood as an other condition that is the object of contemporary consumer culture's deformation of the concept of the human, and argues that commodification's negative effects can be shown by the damage it does to childhood. By contrast, Lyotard invokes childhood to assimilate it with postmodernism, and to argue that adulthood's technoculture produces an agency for adulthood that matches the playful and positive

agency he finds in childhood's state of becoming. These two approaches each deal with the stakes of modernity and media culture, reaching opposite conclusions, but each adopts childhood as the conceptual terrain for describing how subjectivity is transformed and made other to its accustomed forms. The discursive construct of childhood can be deployed theoretically to deconstruct the notion of the subject in modernity, and can be connected to the technological media culture which similarly borders and challenges human subjectivity. The textuality of *Teletubbies*, through its ambivalent invocation of conceptions of childhood and of television, is engaged in this struggle over the borders between human and inhuman, and the questions of aesthetics and politics that the struggle raises.

Corresponding issues are raised by the series' relationship with commodity culture, since *Teletubbies* shares with other television programmes the conception of childhood as a market category that, while protected by legislation and guidelines of various kinds, is not essentially different from the consumer culture of adulthood. The sale of licensed products associated with *Teletubbies*, such as toys, videotapes, clothing and foods, raised £330 million in its first two years, raising and maintaining the programme's profile and supporting the BBC's brand as a public service broadcaster. The *Teletubbies*' simultaneous familiarity and alienness was extended by their penetration into the material environment of the home and family, where the commodification represented by Teletubby dolls, for example, could be understood in Postman's terms as the colonization of 'natural' childhood and its homely setting by inhuman things. On the other hand, Teletubby dolls are things that provide ways of thinking about the self as a thing that takes the form of an alien other for another human being. The dolls pose an equivalence between being a Teletubby and being a child, in their physical form and in the identifications with them that play makes possible.¹² If human subjects use things like toys to define their selves in distinction to those things, the subject can also be thought of as a thing against which another subject could define himself or herself. The self is constituted against what is alien and other to it, but thus comes to occupy the role of an other thing for another subject. *Teletubbies* merchandise is no different to merchandise from other programmes in this sense, so there is no need to develop this argument in detail here. But my earlier points about how the *Teletubbies* are both human and inhuman, childlike and alien creatures, are given added support by the inherent duality in these respects of the toys representing them. Because the *Teletubbies* are familiar in the sense that they represent childhood and are childlike, they make childhood familiar. Yet because they are alien, non-human creatures, they make childhood alien too when they represent it. Teletubby dolls and other toys both belong to childhood and mark its difference from adulthood, and as commodities they also draw childhood into sets of relationships with objects and meanings that are familiar aspects of adult consumer culture. The dual significance of the

12 I have analyzed this duality in relation to toys in Jonathan Bignell, 'Where is Action Man's penis?: determinations of gender and the bodies of toys', in Naomi Segal, Lib Taylor and Roger Cook (eds), *Indeterminate Bodies* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 36–47; "'Get ready for action!": reading Action Man toys', in Dudley Jones and Tony Watkins (eds), *'A Necessary Fantasy?': the Heroic Figure in Children's Popular Culture* (New York, NY and London: Garland, 2000), pp. 231–50; and 'The meanings of war toys and war games', in Ian Stewart and Susan Carruthers (eds), *War, Culture and the Media: Representations of the Military in 20th Century Britain* (Trowbridge: Flicks, 1996), pp. 165–84.

13 This argument about materiality and identity is used in deconstructive work on the body in relation to sexual identity, in Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 1993).

14 Roger Singleton-Turner, *Television and Children* (London: BBC, 1994).

15 Ibid., p. 23.

16 Ibid.

Teletubbies as both familiar and alien adds an interesting twist to this argument about the commodity culture of toys, by drawing attention to the ways in which toys in general are consumer objects that blur the boundaries between childhood and adulthood, introducing the notions of getting and having objects into childhood, and the notion of becoming a self by playing out identities in parallel and in contrast to objects into adulthood. Toys are often blamed for making childhood as acquisitive as adulthood, but far from toys determining what the culture of childhood is, the production of the embodied human self in childhood works by establishing an inhuman and alien object (the toy) in order to distinguish it from the human and familiar entity that it will help to define as its other (the child).¹³ The same process shapes the way that the concept of childhood is invoked as the determinant of adulthood, where childhood is projected retrospectively as an other epoch in which adulthood was already being prepared for but whose meaning can only be understood subsequently. But as I argued above, in relation to the deployment of the concept of childhood in Lyotard's writing, this leaves the concepts of the toy and of the child as inhuman, both coming before adult subjective agency, and also inhabiting it as the sign of its own possibility. The concepts of childhood and the toy occupy the same discursive position as the postmodern does in Lyotard's formulation, because each of them is projected backwards as a foundation for what happens later. For Lyotard, the postmodern is that which is not yet determined, but which will have been the founding moment when a subsequent state of modernity is formed. The same logic produces Lyotard's conception of childhood as a state of becoming whose meaning and identity can only be understood retrospectively.

The aesthetic forms of *Teletubbies* match dominant conceptions of what television for children should do to develop competencies required in adulthood, and thus create a concept of childhood that legitimates some kinds of television aesthetic and excludes others. There is a childhood constructed for television which legitimates television for children. Roger Singleton-Turner, for example, an experienced BBC producer and director, has written a book addressed both to programme makers and also a wider audience of educators, parents and officials concerned with children and television.¹⁴ His work argues that children and adults have different competencies and knowledge, and he sets up a conception of childhood based on discourses of knowledge from developmental psychology and theories of media literacy. For example: 'The whole grammar of television needs to be learnt by each viewer. There is evidence that the language of film and television is learnt in a similar way to spoken language and that children of increasing maturity accept with understanding an increasing vocabulary of filmic conventions.'¹⁵ The consequence of this for the form of programmes for children is, he argues, that narrative forms should be relatively linear and clear, to avoid a child viewer creating 'extraordinary constructions in his [sic] mind to explain what he has seen'.¹⁶ A discursive model of child

development is constructed as an evolutionary learning process which moves teleologically towards the normative adult viewer. The specific results of this developmental schema are to proscribe the audiovisual form of programmes, according to the 'stage' in development at which the child is assumed to be, with the simplest forms for the youngest audience. In programmes for the youngest audience, like *Teletubbies*, relationships between long shots and closeups should be signposted, to avoid confusion over the sizes of objects and people. Time ellipses between shots should be rare in programmes for young children, and cutting rates should be slower than for an adult audience. Thus the form of children's programmes that Singleton-Turner recommends comes to resemble early cinema, and children's programmes repeat the 'evolution' of film from a static camera shooting theatrical boxed sets, with little cutting or change of frame size, to a contemporary style of rapid montage, fast cutting, and unmotivated use of pan or closeup in programmes for older children. The learning curve of child viewers becomes a condensed version of the normative and teleological history of audiovisual communication.

These principles for making programmes aimed at young children repeat the problems of knowledge that I outlined in relation to Ragdoll's research into actual children's play. They propose that childhood is characterized by underdevelopment of the faculties of cognition that make sense of dimension, cause and effect, temporal sequence and spatial relationships. Research into actual children's behaviour legitimates this, establishing childhood as an other mode of being to adulthood, and leading to specific television forms that aim to give back to the imagined child audience the kind of television that the research has claimed it needs. Ragdoll's *Teletubbies* webpage briefly explains the form of the programme in these terms, for example: 'In Teletubbyland, things happen again and again, giving a child time to discover patterns of cause and effect, allowing a child to anticipate what will happen next'.¹⁷ Repetition of this kind can be seen when the actuality sequences of children playing are repeated, when individual Teletubbies repeatedly perform an action, such as jumping into a puddle, and in the repetition of narrative segments that persist from episode to episode, such as the opening line of voiceover narration, the Teletubbies' welcoming waves to the camera, or their refusal to go to bed at the end. Spatial relationships and the proportionality of objects of different sizes are built into the design of the outdoor set, where the hillocks of the landscape allow for Teletubbies to walk towards a static camera from a distance, periodically disappearing behind hillocks and reappearing again, or wending their way towards the camera from afar along the contours of the landscape. However, the programme also plays with this carefully structured environment of time and space, for example in an extended sequence in which Tinky Winky 'impossibly' puts all kinds of objects discovered in Teletubbyland into his bag. Objects both large and small are stuffed into the bag, which is clearly much too small to contain them all. This is a

17 'About Teletubbies', accessed from www.ragdoll.co.uk.

magical game with proportional size that can only achieve its comic effect in distinction to the rules of space and proportion that the programme has already worked to establish. As in other aspects of my argument here, *Teletubbies* establishes rules so that it can break them, or makes ideas familiar so that they can become alien, and plays with distinctions and oppositions so that they are deconstructed.

Teletubbies is thus addressed to an imagined audience defined by its childhood, and the kinds of cognitive competence that this conception presupposes. But the programme includes ideas and aesthetic forms that are alien to this, and integrates them as familiar kinds of trope, thus destabilizing what 'alien' and 'familiar' mean to the series. Similar reversals and ambiguities affect the way that the programme's address to its viewer is described. The Ragdoll webpage explains: 'Teletubbies is a responsible, enjoyable half-hour where our youngest viewers find their place: a playful, imaginative world inhabited by gentle, loving characters exploring and experiencing everything around them. The series is also a wonderful opportunity for parents to share the joy of first discovery through children's eyes.' *Teletubbies* is offered to adults as a site where children 'find their place', both within the television schedule and as a fictional world where the concept of childhood is represented in concrete audiovisual forms that characterize it as 'imaginative' and 'playful'. The Teletubbies represent childhood inasmuch as they are 'gentle' and 'loving' beings whose predominant activities are 'exploring' and 'experiencing'. Thus the programme's imagined audience is posed as equivalent to the Teletubbies. Furthermore, adults are given the opportunity to 'share the joy of first discovery' by viewing from the audience position laid out for children. It is suggested that the adult audience can partake in this experience of childhood and remove the apparent boundary that separates their experience from the childhood which the Teletubbies and the child audience are said to already have, and which adulthood has supposedly lost. Adulthood can regain an equivalence with childhood, the text claims, through the watching of *Teletubbies*. So there is a series of displacements here in which Teletubbyland, childhood and adulthood become equivalent to each other. And further, since each of these identities become the same, the difference between them is erased. *Teletubbies* becomes a ground on which boundaries and distinctions become confused and blur into each other, following the logic of dissolution that I have been identifying in different contexts throughout this article.

Teletubbies works with ambivalent and contradictory conceptions of what childhood is and means for western thought, and for British children's television in particular. Childhood is defined negatively and retrospectively against adulthood, thus raising the issues of how identities are discriminated and represented, and how the one turns into the other. Television for children is made by adults, so determining what childhood is requires a complex and conflicting range of understandings which seek to shape childhood and mobilize it discursively. The

contradictory place of childhood in western culture exists at an uncertain border between human and inhuman, self and other. On the one hand, childhood has been seen (in the Christian tradition) as a predisposition to immorality and sin, as irrational and incomplete. On the other hand, Romantic conceptions of childhood pose it as uncorrupted, innocent, authentic, and in contrast to the guile and artifice of adulthood. This Romantic childhood is a sign of loss and nostalgia, regarded as a potential and an origin that is always already lost, and thus desired. It is this duality in conceptions of childhood as inhuman and improper, or as central to the proper essence of the human, that produced the debates about the value of *Teletubbies*.

Some commentators argued that *Teletubbies* was not educative enough, because it uses some 'primitive babytalk' like 'Eh-oh' for Hello, and does little to encourage understanding of reading, number or spatial concepts, for example.¹⁸ The demand for television to communicate knowledge and citizenship rests on the argument that the function of television for children is to lead them towards adult capabilities and discipline them in the norms of adulthood. By contrast, the merchandising effort around *Teletubbies* and other children's programmes can be seen as a cynical ploy to make money, and as evidence of television's contamination of childhood by the ideologically suspect world of adulthood's commodities, brands and consumerism. This critique rests on the value given to childhood's supposed freedom from the acquisitiveness and commercialism of adult culture, where childhood is regarded as a privileged realm of 'natural' play and freedom that should be protected. The relative lack of paternalistic instructional discourse in *Teletubbies*, the child-centredness that might be found in the supervisory gaze of the sun baby who floats above Teletubbyland, and the *Teletubbies*' childlike love of falling over, hugging and splashing in puddles, for instance, derive from its producers' liberal embrace of the latter of these conceptions of childhood. Wood was quoted to that effect in a *Radio Times* feature in 1997:

We knew there would be debate about whether it is possible for children to make their own meaning or whether they constantly need instruction from an adult. There are people who still believe the only way to help children is to instruct them. We're coming from a different philosophy. We credit our viewers with lots of imagination.¹⁹

The debates about whether *Teletubbies* promotes the acquisition of language and social relationships, or wallows in directionless play, rehearse old arguments about the aims, legitimacy and value of children's television in an era of waning certainty about the function and value of public service television.²⁰ Parents, educators and regulators targeted the BBC in particular to urge that programmes for children should have greater regard for the functions of television in education and child development. These responsibilities on the part of programme makers and broadcasters have underlain much of the discourse of British

18 On initial responses to *Teletubbies* from parents, educators and the press, see David Buckingham, 'Telly trouble', *English and Media Magazine*, no. 39 (Autumn 1998), pp. 14–18.

19 Celia Dodd, 'Teletubbies mastermind', *Radio Times* 27 September–3 October 1997, p. 22.

20 See Jonathan Bignell, 'Writing the child in media theory', *Yearbook of English Studies* no. 32 (2002), pp. 127–39.

television production for children in the public service tradition, since PSB has aimed to provide educative or improving programmes, and to offer a range of different programme types at different levels of accessibility for adult and child audiences. The issue is whether television, made by adults for children, should discipline an unformed and wayward childhood out of its alienness and towards adulthood, or whether television should cradle an Edenic and natural childhood whose difference from adulthood is a sign that it is the essential core of humanity before adult culture deforms it.

Why choose *Teletubbies*?

There are two related but contrary ways of thinking about the relationship between childhood as a concept and actual children, and in both everyday and critical discourses these tend to blur and turn into each other. This problem has affected very many discourses from moral panics in the popular press, educational legislation, television policy and of course the behaviour of both adults and children. I have suggested when mentioning Ragdoll's research, above, that actual children might be observed in order to elucidate what characterizes childhood. This would produce a concept of childhood that could be mapped back onto actual children, and would facilitate evaluative judgements about what belongs to childhood and what is alien to it. On the other hand, childhood can be conceived as a self-sufficient concept that transcends what actual children do, and could be employed as regulatory idea that would legislate for how children should behave, how adults should relate to children, and how television should be made for them, for example. In writing about childhood and children, there is a perpetual oscillation between using the concept of childhood as an explanatory frame for understanding actual children, and adducing actual children's actions to support or challenge conceptions of childhood. The two issues here are whether the concept or the 'evidence' comes first, and how the boundaries around childhood set up its propriety by including some elements and excluding others in a way which facilitates the eruption of what seems alien into both childhood and its other.

Teletubbies is a fascinating site for analyzing negotiations around conceptions of childhood, the audience imagined for children's television, and representations of human and alien, adult or child subjectivity. Childhood for *Teletubbies* is familiar but alien, so is adulthood and so is television. The fact that childhood is both an anterior prefiguration of adulthood and an other to it, means that the *Teletubbies* and childhood represent, at the same time, boundaries, others, prefigurations, and confusions of categories. Television enacts and mediates the categories of adulthood and childhood, alien and familiar, and is represented as both familiar and alien itself, so it is part of these debates as well as a medium for working them through. The analysis of *Teletubbies* is therefore a productive way of addressing questions of

21 Jason Jacobs, 'Teletubbies', in Glen Creeber (ed.), *Fifty Key Television Programmes* (London: Arnold, 2004), pp. 203–7; Lury, *Interpreting Television*, pp. 88–94.

identity and representation, but the programme is a privileged example because of its reflexive work on questions of what television can be and what it can do. It for these reasons that the programme appears as one of fifty 'key' television programmes in Glen Creeber's recent collection and as a case study in Karen Lury's recent book.²¹ These evaluations and analyses by other writers have argued, as this essay does more implicitly perhaps, that *Teletubbies* is complex, revealing and enjoyable. It is not just a programme that lends itself to the instrumental application of postmodernist theoretical arguments, and I have tried to avoid addressing it exclusively in that way here. *Teletubbies* also works as a site for exposing some of those arguments' hesitations, ambiguities and problems. The issue I have dwelt on most has been the precise forms that the concept of childhood takes in *Teletubbies* and in some postmodernist thinking, and although there are interesting correspondences between them, I have shown that childhood is far from precise in either the programme or the theory. Each of them works on an absent childhood and absent children that are at the centre of their discourse and also frame their borders. Forming a conception of childhood and adducing knowledge about actual children is an inescapable task for *Teletubbies* and, it seems, for postmodernist thinking that bases its sense of the present on a retrospectively constructed past. But at the same time as childhood and children become familiar and knowable others, they introduce into adulthood and the lives of adults the alienness and unknowability that they represent. Considering *Teletubbies* in this way is an excellent means to deconstruct what is at stake in television for children, and what children and childhood are for television.

'Crazyspace': the politics of children's screen drama

MÁIRE MESSENGER DAVIES

'The server's packed up. . . . How come you're still on line?'
'I'm not on the internet. . . . This is a separate network for kids to chat. Supposed to be *safer* than surfing the net.'
'So you can still chat? To people all over the place?'
'Only children.'
'Children will do fine. . . . Can you show us how to get in?'
'We can use Crazyspace. . . . No-one's going to spot it so long as we keep the messages sounding like nonsense'.¹

¹ Gillian Cross, *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 60–61, 107.

In this essay, I examine the concept of 'space' – whether cyberspace, 'Crazyspace' or simply space – to discuss some aspects of children's screen culture. I argue that the provision of a space within culture for screen material for children, whether as film or as television drama, is political, and thus relates to questions of power and agency.

The politics of children's screen provision has a number of aspects: first, there is the institutional aspect, such as the legal mandating of the British, terrestrial commercial channel, ITV, to provide children's programming, or the BBFC's (British Board of Film Classification) age-classification of films; second, there is the issue of the presumed 'specialness' of the child audience, which raises the longstanding question of 'effects', the suitability, or otherwise, of material aimed at children, and the necessity for regulation; and third – the primary topic of this paper – there are the means whereby screen material aimed *at* children (as well as *about* children) can demonstrate children's own social and political agency in generically specific ways. As such, I suggest, the provision of such material intersects with both institutional

and moralistic aspects of children's media politics; for children to become active social and political agents, issues need to be represented in forms that are meaningful and relevant to them as a distinct group within the population. In arguing this, obviously I do see children as distinct: they are a culturally and ethnically highly-varied group whose distinctiveness is primarily in being different from adults (adults being biologically fully-grown human beings broadly over the age of eighteen). However, I will not use this essay to go into the various developmental and sociological issues underpinning definitions and constructions of childhood.²

The institutional politics of children's screen material

In 1995, the World Summit movement for children and television was launched at an international conference in Melbourne and, since then, has taken place every two years, organized primarily by the broadcasting and ancillary industries, with some involvement from academics and educators – the most recent being in Rio in 2003. The movement is obviously motivated by programme makers and producers who wish to defend their expertise and their jobs, but it also draws ideological support from the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, 1989, ratified by the majority of countries in the world. The Declaration's Article 12 provides for the 'right of the child to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account, in any matter or procedure affecting the child'. Article 13 asserts the child's right to freedom of expression and information.

This right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Children's screen provision has its own political champions, who often use it as a platform for an anti-globalization position. MEP (Member of the European Parliament) Carole Tongue, who has had a longstanding interest in children's broadcasting services, pointed out to the DCMS (Department of Culture, Media and Sport) review of the BBC's digital provision in 2004:

The important thing to recognise is that the fierce battle being waged in this country [the UK] for child viewers is being conducted between a broadcasting territory with a historic focus on its own audience and a continent which has always looked beyond its own boundaries towards global expansion and some would argue, dominance [that is, the USA].³

Academics, too, have vociferously debated the politics of children's screen provision.⁴ This is usually within a context of either concern about

2 For further reading on this topic, see Allison James, Chris Jenks and Alan Prout, *Theorizing Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1998); Louise Barrett, Robin Dunbar and John Lycett, *Human Evolutionary Psychology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Helen Bee and Denise Boyd, *The Developing Child* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 2000); Máire Messenger Davies, 'Dear BBC': *Children, Television Storytelling and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

3 Quoted in Patrick Barwise (ed.), *Independent Review of the BBC's Digital Television Services* (London: Department of Culture, Media and Sport, 2004). URL: http://www.culture.gov.uk/global/publications/archive_2004/review_bbc_digital_tv_services_+.htm [accessed 13 June 2005].

4 J. G. Blumler, *The Future Of Children's Television in Britain: an Enquiry for the Broadcasting Standards Council* (London: Broadcasting Standards Council, 1992); Cary Bazalgette and Terry Staples, 'Unshrinking the kids: children's cinema and the family film', in Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham (eds), *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), pp. 92–108; David Buckingham, Hannah Davies, Ken Jones and Peter Kelley, *Children's Television in Britain: History, Discourse and Policy* (London: British Film Institute, 1999); Máire Messenger Davies, 'Supplementary report on CBBC and CBeebies', in Barwise (ed.), *Independent Review*.

5 Such as Stephen Kline, *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children's Culture in an Age of TV Marketing* (London: Verso, 1995).

6 David Buckingham, *After the Death of Childhood* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

7 For example the DCMS Green Paper, 2005. See URL: bbc.charterreview.org.uk for information.

8 Steven Starker, *Evil Influences: Crusades against the Mass Media* (Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991); Martin Barker and Julian Petley (eds), *Ill Effects: the Media Violence Debate* (London: Routledge, 1997); J.O. Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta Rap, 1830–1996* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

9 Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: the Meaning and Importance of Fairytales* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976); Alison Lurie, *Don't Tell the Grownups: Subversive Children's Literature* (London: Bloomsbury, 1990).

10 See, for example, Anna Home, *Into the Box of Delights* (London: BBC, 1993).

encroaching commercialization,⁵ or within a sociology of childhood paradigm which tends to argue that childhood as a social construct is 'dead'.⁶ Screen media for children, far from being an innocent and value-free area of culture, is often found at the cutting edge of the clash between public service values and the market, currently dominating public discourse about broadcasting, such as the future of the BBC.⁷ The provision of screen media for children, nowadays including cyberspace, computer software and the vast and increasingly profitable gaming industry, constitutes a space of contestation in a classically political sense.

Suitability: the effects debate

Within this larger economic and political debate there is a further controversy about what is 'suitable' and appropriate to be offered to children, and again, whether acknowledged or not, the contestation is political: about children's rights to information, as stated in the Declaration, versus the adult world's 'duty' to protect them. This 'moral panic' effects debate has a long history⁸ and it has been conducted almost entirely by, and for, adults. In the following discussion, I want to look at some specific products of children's screen media in order to propose that children themselves have a role to play in articulating and deciding these issues: further, that this agency can be expressed symbolically, realistically, narratively, generically and technologically, in other words through the whole range of devices traditionally deployed in the narrative arts by writers and producers sensitive to the point of view of the child. The claim of child-empowerment is often made for children's fiction and has been made for traditional fairytales, most notably by Bruno Bettelheim and Alison Lurie.⁹ But I want to make it for children's television drama – a category whose generic characteristics permit the inclusion of some feature films.

The 'genre' of children's television

The special characteristics of children's television as a genre include the following:

- The genre is unusual in being defined by the people who watch it, ('children') not by features of content;
- It implies opposition to 'adult genres' – 'adult' usually means sexual or taboo content, not allowed in 'children's' (see discussion below about the '15 fuck');
- It is often overtly didactic – it is required to teach lessons about life and not to set 'bad examples',¹⁰ and its provision is often justified on these grounds;
- It is required to be intellectually and imaginatively enriching and educational and to confer cultural capital;

- Children's screen material is provided by adults *for* children, not by children themselves; where there are exceptions, these are still produced via adult supervision;
- It is heavily regulated (for example, the film age classification system; the nine o'clock television watershed);
- It is regulated *for* as well as *against*: it is seen as a public good, particularly in Britain, but also worldwide, as in the case of the World Summit movement and organizations like Action for Children's Television (ACT) in the USA and British Action for Children's Television (BACTV) in the UK;
- It may be highly commodified – associated with merchandising, marketing and cross-media promotions, such as *Teletubbies* or *Bob the Builder*;
- From a political-economic viewpoint, as argued above, it occupies a seriously contested space and should be taken seriously (but often is not).

The 'space' of children's television

It is not the business of children's channels to offer information. . . . The Disney channels offer a safe haven . . . for parents who do not want their children to get in touch with upsetting pictures of the war on other channels.¹¹

This [Crazyspace] is a separate network for kids to chat. Supposed to be *safer* than surfing the Net . . .

We can use Crazyspace. . . . No-one's going to spot it so long as we keep the messages sounding like nonsense.¹²

These are two contrasting conceptions of the 'space' occupied by children's television. In the first definition of children's television as a 'safe haven', the speaker is referring to factual programmes, specifically news about the 2003 Iraq war and its aftermath. Here, children's television channels are seen as an escape from the painful realities of adult politics (although it is worth noting that many other European factual producers, including the producers of the BBC's *Newsround*, do not agree). In the second of these quotations, taken from a children's book series made into a television drama, Crazyspace conceptualizes children's media differently: in Gillian Cross's *Demon Headmaster* books, adapted for BBC television between 1995 and 1999, Crazyspace is a cyberchannel exclusively for children. It is used by them to subvert the Nietzschean plans of the Demon Headmaster to take over the world and impose 'order' by controlling all forms of communication and, significantly, to abolish childhood. Crazyspace is a place where children can safely take political action because, as one of them points out, in Crazyspace, they can be confident that adults will not notice them.

11 Ralf Gerhardt, director of programming, Disney Germany, quoted in Petra Strohmeier, 'The Iraq War on children's TV', *Television*, no. 16 (2004), pp. 18–23.

12 Cross, *The Demon Headmaster Takes Over*, p. 107.

13 Messenger Davies, 'Supplementary report on CBBC and CBeebies'.

14 'Submission for the Secretary of State's Review of the BBC's new digital television services: Detailed Service Submissions: BBC3, BBC4, CBBC, CBeebies'. (London: BBC, 2004), p. 2.

15 Bazalgette and Staples, 'Unshrinking the kids'.

16 Messenger Davies, 'Dear BBC', ch. 5.

I have found the notion of Crazyspace useful in conceptualizing some recurrent features of children's screen drama, the provision of which, as I have argued above, is a political issue. As part of the BBC Charter Review in summer 2004, I was asked to contribute to a report for the DCMS in which the BBC was required to justify the continuation of its dedicated children's digital channels, CBBC and CBeebies.¹³ In their submission for the Secretary of State's review, they set out their agenda:

CBeebies is an important part of the new digital portfolio strategy for BBC television. . . . The BBC is committed to driving digital take up and CBeebies plays a critical role in that objective.¹⁴

In other words, as in the early days of television in the USA, when educational programmes for children were broadcast to encourage families to buy sets, the family market is a primary target for new and (in the case of commercial broadcasters) profitable developments arising from the introduction of new communications technology.

The characteristics of Crazyspace

Despite, or perhaps because of, this commercial agenda, children's screen products can get away with quite radical political positions, because – as with Cross's Crazyspace – adults do not notice they are there. This subversive generic space has a number of characteristics: first, as suggested by the example in the internet cafe, Crazyspace is something which adults do not notice. Second, it involves the carnivalesque subversion of adult authority by child protagonists, conveyed not by serious narrative devices such as the adult courtroom drama, but through silly, childish, 'wacky' ingredients, such as the special cyberchannel that allows children to exchange jokes. Third, is its use of point of view: children's screen drama is told (and largely shot) from the point of view of the child protagonists – 'coping with adults, or coping without them'.¹⁵ Children are the agents of good, and 'good' adults are myopic: they do not see what is going on, which permits children to be the story's main protagonists and moral centre. Fourth, there is a sense, as with fairytale, of the universality of the experiences of childhood. Fifth, aesthetically there is often a violation of realism. Children's fiction generally is less bound by constraints of realism than adult's; magic, fantasy, fairytale and slapstick humour, are staple ingredients which for producers are creatively liberating and for children provide the psychological release of a 'long ago and far away'. Sixth is the didactic element, often required by adult publishers, programme commissioners and policymakers, but also by children themselves.¹⁶ This is often demonstrated by the setting of 'good' examples and through the encouragement of empathy for the less fortunate.

Examining some of the features of Crazyspace in more detail, I start with my first claim, above, that it is a place that adults are not fully aware of, even when they are actually responsible for providing it. The

17 Máire Messenger Davies and Kate O'Malley, 'Children and television drama: a review of the literature', unpublished report to the BBC, (London: London College of Printing, 1996), p. 138.

18 Ibid.

19 See Máire Messenger Davies and David Machin, 'Children's demon TV – reality, freedom, panic: children's discussions of *The Demon Headmaster*', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*, vol. 14, no. 1 (2000), pp. 37–50; Máire Messenger Davies, 'Just that kids' thing': the politics of "Crazyspace", children's television and the case of *The Demon Headmaster*', in Jonathan Bignell and Stephen Lacey (eds), *British Television Drama: New Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, forthcoming).

20 David Buckingham, *Moving Images* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Barker and Petley (eds), *Ill Effects*; Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture and Moral Panics*.

21 For example, Allison James, and Alan Prout (eds), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Falmer Press, 1997); James, Jenks and Prout, *Theorizing Childhood*.

22 Neil Postman, *The Disappearance of Childhood* (London: WH Allen, 1982).

following quote from Anna Home, the head of children's BBC who commissioned *The Demon Headmaster*, illustrates what I mean. When asked to comment on the story's themes of 'people gaining control over other people, and threats to individual freedom', she replied 'Yes, but I don't think that anybody [in television] sits down and analyses it like that'.¹⁷ While she was resistant to the idea that the series might have any political content, she was also aware that children did appreciate substantive storytelling:

there's a lot of people saying you should be doing more wacky, funky things based on computer games, and they [children] don't want it.¹⁸

The paradox in the success of *The Demon Headmaster* – which relates directly to the generic characteristics of Crazyspace – was that it could actually be read as a *defence* of 'wacky funky things based on computer games'. In what Home described as the story's 'battle between good and evil' – a battle between totalitarianism and intellectual and civic liberty – it was the 'wacky funky things' in Crazyspace which were enlisted on the side of good. In contrast, it was the formal educational institutions – in the first series a school, in the second series a research station, and in the third series a university – which were enlisted on the side of evil. In the first series, for instance, during a silly gameshow modelled on *Tiswas* and *Beat the Teacher*, the Head was deluged in 'gunge' by one of the child protagonists before he could hypnotize the nation's television watchers into political conformity.

David Machin and I have previously looked more closely at the context of the broadcasting of this programme, and discussed why the first series, particularly, was such a huge hit, gaining a 70% share of the child audience and beating even the popular soap opera *EastEnders* in the all-programme ratings for children.¹⁹ We suggested that, in the 1990s, in the wake of the murder of toddler James Bulger by two ten-year-olds in 1993, British children began to be demonized in the bad press that has now become endemic. As well as press stories about falling educational standards, the introduction of standardized testing in schools, curfews (nowadays the ASBO or Anti-Social Behaviour Order), there was also a spate of academic writing on children and media, focusing not on the stories they enjoyed, but on their relationship to media violence and moral panics.²⁰ The sociological deconstruction of childhood²¹ reinforced the arguments in Neil Postman's 1982 *The Disappearance of Childhood* (which blamed television for the destruction of western childhood)²² and culminated, perhaps, in the sombre title of Buckingham's *After the Death of Childhood* in 2000.

The Demon Headmaster announced that these various experts and pundits might be wrong about the disappearance of childhood and the increasing amorality of real children. Instead, it dramatized how the educational establishment, in refusing to listen to children (who, after all, might know best about childhood), are mistaken. Whilst the Demon Headmaster himself, in a chilling speech about the need to abolish

childhood altogether (through genetic engineering), suggests it is because children themselves are a problem, the story ultimately demonstrates that he is wrong. This brings me to the third, and most subversive, characteristic of Crazyspace. In Crazyspace, the view that children are a 'problem' is always wrong; the correct moral vision belongs to children and it is adults who are at fault. The outcome of all three series in which Head's attempts to achieve totalitarian control are overthrown, not just by a group of children, but also by 'childish things' such as gunge and computer games, demonstrates in a highly entertaining (and, judging from the impressive ratings, very popular) way, children's right to be seen as a group with some moral and political value to society after all.

Realistic drama

The Demon Headmaster was fantasy, but Crazyspace also exists in realistic contemporary drama and, encouragingly, examples of this can be found in many European children's productions – for example, the Danish 2004 series about Jewish refugee children in Denmark during World War II, *Island in the Sea*. (The discouraging aspect of this is that non-English-language programmes for children still do not get widely shown in English-speaking countries.) My next example is a recent BBC drama dealing with a contemporary political theme – the fate of asylum-seekers.²³ *The Face at the Window* had the standard, reliable narrative format of a group of brave and foolhardy children taking on the adult world: three prosperous middle-class children somewhere in the English Home Counties hide a child from a Balkan country, who has witnessed a massacre and is being hunted down by the murderers, posing as charity workers.

Erri, the refugee child, is represented as culturally alien and cannot speak English at all; the series thus acknowledges the importance and the potential difficulty of such cultural differences between children. But, like *The Demon Headmaster* – and here is my fourth ingredient of Crazyspace – it also proposes a universal value. It suggests that, when it comes to challenging tyranny and abuse, childhood and the moral solidarity of children, as distinct from the myopic confusion of adults, can transcend cultural differences and can be a major defence against political injustice. *The Demon Headmaster* demonstrates this proposition through fantasy/science fiction; *The Face at the Window* presents it realistically. An example of the child's moral world-view, and its relationship with the various playful and subversive ingredients of Crazyspace, can be seen in an early sequence in *Face at the Window*, in which the refugee child first reveals to his child rescuers what has happened to him. (This is known to the viewer already, through a pre-credit sequence showing a massacre in a small Balkan village, witnessed by Erri from his hiding place in a coal bunker). In this sequence, Crazyspace is not only a metaphorical space but is also a series of actual

²³ *The Face at the Window* (BBC, 2003), d. Graeme Harper, p. Josephine Ward.

physical spaces, used by the characters and organized by the camera to illustrate the point.

In the sequence, we first see Erri as the eponymous face at the window – but from the back, staring out of the window with the camera behind him in the room. He has been rescued by his young English friends who (along with the viewer) have first seen him from the front, staring through the window of a refugee reception centre. Thus, as the camera shows us repeatedly, from whatever point of view we see him, he is trapped. In Crazyspace, the point of view of the child is always privileged.

In the next scene, we see another familiar feature of Crazyspace, the well-meaning but myopic ‘good adult’, the aunt of Lesley, one of the child rescuers. Lesley’s aunt cannot work out why she is taking food from the table and putting it in her pocket. In children’s screen drama, such gullibility on the part of ‘good’ adults is a standard requirement, permitting children to be the main protagonists of the narrative and to get into the kind of danger which makes for exciting storytelling. In Crazyspace, mums, dads, doctors and teachers are never permitted fully to understand the situation; only the children – including the child audience – have this privilege. The sequence then moves to a brief scene where we see the bad adult for the first time, the necessary villain from whom Erri has to escape. He is receiving a phone call from Lesley in his apparent capacity as an aid worker, so we cannot yet be certain that he is really bad. However, the camera gives us some clues. There is a tight closeup and his eyes narrow, possibly menacingly. Then we enter Crazyspace itself, diegetically a ‘real’ space, the unused space in Lesley’s aunt’s house, appropriated by the children to provide a refuge for Erri. Typically, here the invading children do not eat sensible food but devour cake and chocolate, transforming the grownup purpose of the ‘spare bedroom’ into a transgressive space, in which they are doing something ‘bad’ for the purposes of doing ‘good’ (we can relate this to Huckleberry Finn’s willingness to go to hell for disobeying his aunt, in order to stand by his friend, the slave Jim). As the scene makes quite explicit, and as always in Crazyspace, there is a moral purpose underlying the Bunteresque greed: this scene is the first in which Erri conveys trust in one of his rescuers and reveals to her the trauma he has been through. Appropriately, the trauma is conveyed through a childish medium – a drawing. When Lesley begins to interpret the drawing, Erri’s memories return, the adult world beyond Crazyspace breaks in and the child begins to scream. Only when the other child is able to reassure him, reimposing the safe haven of Crazyspace, does he stop. The scene ends with the lost child being hugged and comforted by the only permissible agent of rescue in children’s screen drama – another child.

Such representations would, I suggest, be less acceptable in an adult screen drama, including those – like the film *Cidade de Deus/City of God* (Fernando Meirelles and Kátia Lund, 2002) – in which children are the main protagonists. This is partly because children’s screen drama often

²⁴ See Buckingham, Davies, Jones and Kelley, *Children's Television in Britain*.

²⁵ Paul Hazard, *Books, Children and Men* (Boston, MA: The Horn Book, 1947).

²⁶ Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, p. 25.

uses overt, almost melodramatic emotionalism, in which feelings are very pointedly delineated for a child audience which may not be familiar with how people generally react to bereavement, danger or being in trouble with the law. These scenes may also be unsatisfactory to adults because they stretch credibility – which brings me to my fifth characteristic of Crazyspace: its lack of respect for literal realism, especially in suggesting that children can be more powerful than adults. Realistically, it would be impossible for three middle-class children to hide a refugee Balkan boy in their elegant suburban houses. The unproblematic upper-middle-classness of the milieu is also out of fashion as a setting for radical politics; here, it raises the potential criticism (often made of British children's television)²⁴ that the story has little relevance for less privileged children. But in Crazyspace, it is not the realism of the milieu, nor the untypicalness of the middle-class protagonists that count; in Crazyspace, it is the 'world republic of childhood',²⁵ in Paul Hazard's phrase, that provides the moral and social context of the story. Morally and socially, this is the same context as that of Hansel and Gretel – a place which, in Bettelheim's words, is 'nowhere . . . long ago and far away'.²⁶

The contrast between the unflinching treatment of the lost children in *City of God* and the lost child in *Face at the Window*, is very great in terms both of narrative style and ideological position. In *City of God*, with its brilliant illusion of documentary realism, emphasized by the use of the real inhabitants of the city as actors, children occupy an amoral universe without love, pity, compassion or forgiveness. Adults are very little in evidence – the only possible rescue for these lost children is to enter the apparently civilized adult world of (of all things), journalism. In *City of God*, the moral world of children is, from the audience's point of view, bad; whereas that of adults, including the adults behind the camera, who actually end up 'rescuing' some of these children, is presented as superior. Such an ideology would never find a home in Crazyspace – not on Children's BBC nor Children's ITV nor even Nickelodeon for that matter. This contrast is not just a function of the differences between children's screen drama, with the constraints on what it can show in terms of violence, sex and child abuse, as compared to adult feature films which have fewer of these constraints. Instead, it is a fundamental difference of narrative and point of view in the representation of the moral *agency* of children. Children are the narrative focus and provide the main moral viewpoint in screen drama *for* children; this is not necessarily, and indeed quite rarely, the case in adult screen drama *about* children. One could point to, for example, the long tradition of using 'threatening' child protagonists in horror films.

Film as television

I want to conclude by suggesting that it is possible for adult feature films to share some of the characteristics of Crazyspace, and thus to qualify for

what in my view is the honourable title of 'children's television'. *Billy Elliott* (Stephen Daldry, 2000) has this characteristic, and it includes many scenes which illustrate the Crazyspace features discussed above: the childish activities, the children's point of view, not the adult's; the violation of adult prohibitions; adult violation of childhood innocence, and my sixth ingredient – on which I have not yet touched in my other examples, but which is very prevalent in Crazyspace – the gentle didacticism of teaching liberal pro-social lessons. In the case of *Billy Elliott*, the lesson is tolerance towards gender and sexual diversity.

The sequence is one in which the two twelve-year-olds, Billy and his friend Michael, build a snowman and Michael warms Billy's hands inside his coat, upon which Billy demands: 'Are you a poof?' On receiving no denial, Billy laughs and says – 'come on', and invites Michael into a nearby empty gymnasium to dance. Michael puts on a tutu and Billy begins to teach him balletic arm positions. Meanwhile, outside, a group of drunken adults, including Billy's father, see the snowman and one of them urinates on it. Then, noticing the light in the gym, the men burst in and see the two boys dancing, to which their reaction is appalled aggression.

There is no doubt as to how the audience is positioned and whose point of view is meant to be taken as the required moral vision here. This is very typical of children's television drama, yet less so of adult feature films about children. The paradox of *Billy Elliott* is that it was given a '15' certificate because it included the occasional use of four-letter words – what a BBFC representative described in a talk to my students as 'the "15" fuck'. The '15' fuck is included by producers deliberately to ensure a more marketable adult rating. Although undoubtedly many under-fifteens will have seen *Billy Elliott*, the '15' rating for cinematic exhibition sent out a misleading signal about the nature of the film. In its clear encouragement to the audience to identify with the child subject of the narrative, and thus against the adult protagonists, it was a movie that directly addressed twelve year olds, and among its many ideological positions, it also suggested how they should behave towards minorities. Thus *Billy Elliott* exhibited all the characteristics of a children's television drama and as such is located in Crazyspace. Typically, the grownup world of distribution and marketing failed to acknowledge this, as it also did, for example, with Rob Reiner's '15'-rated film about twelve-year-olds, *Stand by Me* (1986).

Children's screen drama is categorized generically – uniquely – by reference to its audience. The genre of 'children's' implies certain characteristics – and they are the characteristics of what I have called, borrowing from Cross, Crazyspace. In Crazyspace, children are better than adults, and the narrative *dénouement* requires that it is they who overthrow the unjust adult order, often symbolically using childish means such as gunge and nonsense-rhymes, or, as in *Billy Elliott*, spontaneous dance. (The spectacular scene in which Billy angrily tapdances his way through the town after a family row is one such

example of this; his reaction to his father finding him in the gym is also expressed through dance.) In *Crazyspace*, as in life, children develop: through the vicissitudes of the story's events, they acquire positive social values, such as tolerance, empathy and courage. Another, and perhaps *the* classic exposition in children's culture of moral regeneration being intrinsically linked to natural growth and development, is Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*.²⁷

The child protagonists of children's drama have to overcome the limitations of their background and upbringing in order to fulfil the challenges of the narrative, whatever these are. In other words, such films and programmes dramatize what Bettelheim called 'the developmental task',²⁸ the always difficult task of growing up, difficult precisely *because* it involves challenging, and eventually replacing, those who have earlier been our protectors – our parents and the adult community.²⁹ These stories have to be told with a consciousness of the child audience as a group of people to whom the producers have the responsibility to give hope, moral guidance, information and education (for example about the Balkan conflict) as well as – above all – entertainment: *Crazyspace* must always be good fun. And the final paradox: it is the 'good adults' who must create the space to provide it; children cannot do this for themselves.

Regulations requiring 'information and education' are part of the institutional politics of broadcasting in the UK, which in turn are part of the modern institutionalization of children's needs and rights as set out in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Such regulations and conventions, in turn, engage with broader theoretical and societal conceptions, constantly contested, of what childhood is. But these are adult preoccupations. In children's screen drama, the 'good adults' who provide it have a specific moral imperative to follow: no matter how grim the events in the story, the generic requirement of *Crazyspace* storytelling is that the child audience has somehow to be given reassurance – because without it there is no point in growing up at all. In the case of *The Face at the Window*, reassurance is barely possible – the ending is terribly painful. Although Erri is rescued he has to change his identity, and he and his rescuers know they can never see each other again. The final shot shows a different 'face at the window' – this time it is Lesley, watching Erri being led away. Such is the world created by *Demon Headmasters*. But in *Crazyspace* there is always hope, because children generally outlive headmasters, and they also have more fun: this is what makes children's screen drama morally, and also structurally and aesthetically, different as a genre from much screen drama *about* children.

27 Máire Messenger Davies, "'A bit of earth': Sexuality and the representation of childhood in text and screen versions of *The Secret Garden*", *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 48 (Fall 2001), pp. 48–58.

28 Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*, p. 130.

29 I have not invoked Freud or a psychoanalytic reading in this analysis – but it should be obvious how this might be relevant.